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ABSTRACT

The 11 articles in this publication discuss many topics regarding literature for children and adolescents, including the following: the major problems facing teachers and writers alike as they strive to communicate with the young; E.B. White's "Charlotte's Web"; two views of the American Revolution found in "Johnny Tremain" and "My Brother Sam Is Dead"; a contrast of the novel "Sounder" with its sequel, "Sour Land"; the life and career of Edward Stratemeyer, author of the Hardy Boys and the first three books of the Nancy Drew series; the well-loved Pennington trilogy, by the British writer Kathleen M. Peyton; the importance of introducing literature in the elementary schools; bringing to life Howard Fast's Civil War novel, "April Morning," in a junior high school class; a defense of using adolescent literature in the classroom; and ideas for a course on children's literature for future teachers. (CC)

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Literature for Children and Adolescents

iate ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

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LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

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A Message From Your Editor

The last two decades have seen tremendous changes in the area of books for young readers. Literary works for children have begun to attract serious scholarly attention and novels written expressly for adolescents have come a long way since Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth Summer* — improving in quality and expanding in subject matter. This year the Illinois Association of Teachers of English presented the Illinois Author of the Year Award to a writer of junior novels: Richard Peck, a former teacher from Decatur.

Using the locale of his growing-up years as background, Richard Peck has turned out in rapid succession books which have won a wide audience. Teenagers have been held by the excitement of the story springing from the discovery of a dead man in *Dreamland Lake* (1970), touched by the growing-up problems of Carol Patterson in *Don't Look and It Won't Hurt* (1972), and gripped by the suspense of *Through a Brief Darkness* (1973). A behind-the-scenes glimpse of the beauty contest world appeared in 1975 in *Representing SuperDoll,* and the same year saw the publication of *The Ghost Belonged to Me,* the story which provides the basis for a soon to be released film by Disney Productions. Since then, Peck has published a much-needed anthology of poetry, *Pictures That Storm Inside My Head* (1976), a collection selected especially for the young and available in paperback. His latest novel is *Are You in the House Alone?* (1976).

This issue on literature for children and adolescents appropriately opens with Richard Peck's acceptance speech given at the banquet of the IATE Fall Conference in Decatur. As he reminisced with a hometown audience, he highlighted the differences between his generation and the young people of today and identified some of the major problems facing teachers and writers alike as they strive to communicate with the young.

Books which have made that connection are explored in depth in the four articles which follow. Two of them take a close look at one of the most highly esteemed children's books in American literature — E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web.* Peter Neumeyer, Chairperson of the English Department at West Virginia University, demonstrates how this story, which has established itself as a universal favorite, can also stand close critical scrutiny. His article places White's novel in the mainstream of Western literary tradition.

Jim Suchan, a doctoral candidate at the University of Illinois now lecturing at the University of Arizona, explores the same book, with his attention focused on Fern's coming of age. Marilyn Apseloff of the English Department at Kent State University, a teacher who is very active on the national level in children's literature professional organizations, shows how the writers of two historical novels — one of them the Newbery Award winner, *Johnny Tremain* — mirror their own times in their depiction of the American Revolution. Attitudes toward war as a resolution of difficulties have changed drastically since the forties, and Professor Apseloff's contrast of these books written thirty years apart highlights for teachers the importance of point

of view in adolescent fiction. Another Newbery Award winner — William Armstrong's *Sounder* — is the subject of Lois R. Kuznet's critical study. In "Sweet and Sour Land," Professor Kuznet, who teaches English at CUNY, contrasts this novel, introduced to wide audiences through the motion picture version, with a later novel which carries over the character of the boy.

The next section focuses on writers. Edward Stratemeyer, the man behind a phenomenally popular succession of books in series, is introduced by Ken Donelson, an authority on adolescent reading. Donelson reviews the fascinating life and career of this man who devised a scheme for supplying the mass market with an endless stream of stories about such protagonists as Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys. Joy A. Bernard calls attention in her article to one of England's best known writers for the young: K. M. Peyton, whose Pennington trilogy is as familiar to British teenagers as *The Forsyte Saga* is to their parents.

The final section provides a teacher's view of literature for young readers. The articles were selected to provide ideas for teachers at all levels. Virginia A. Duck of Bloomsburg State College in Pennsylvania makes a plea for literature in the grades. In Kay Wilkes' discussion of *April Morning*, she gives suggestions for bringing a Civil War story to life in a junior high school class. C. Thomas Reiter describes his use of adolescent literature in curriculum planning for the department he heads at Oak Lawn, Illinois. And finally, Marilyn Solt speaks to the needs of teachers of teachers by sharing the ideas she got while planning for a course in children's literature at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. Since the material she discusses was chosen ultimately for the young, teachers at all levels will profit from her suggestions.

The last issue of the *Bulletin* will come out in late spring and will feature the best poetry and prose written in Illinois schools.

DOROTHY MATTHEWS
Editor

Reaching the Young Through Books
Illinois Author of the Year Acceptance Speech

RICHARD PECK

To be named Author of the Year is an honor that I stagger under. But it means more to me than I can tell you. So I accept your generosity as a welcome incentive.

These days I travel all over this continent and in England, in search of the tastes and the lifestyles of my young readers. But we're gathered this evening in the first town in which I ever appeared. My mother is here this evening. And she was here during my first appearance too, in an unnamed year in which she celebrated the Great Depression by having me.

To be born in Decatur, Illinois, might not sound the ideal origin for a writer. When you scan fiction's current trends, you find the preferential native ground is either post-immigrant Brooklyn, N.Y., the gothic rural South, or, for the unexplored hinterland, the Chicago of Saul Bellow.

But Decatur has served me well, though it was a different Decatur, back when the room where we meet was a cornfield. I set forth from this town determined to see the Great World outside. In my school days before the subjects of geography and history were undermined by a mindless course called "Social Studies," which is neither social nor a study, I'd heard from my teachers and *National Geographic Magazine* of the wonders of life outside Illinois.

It seemed a goal to see Shakespeare's plays at Stratford, where he was born and buried. In Germany I even sat baffled through Wagnerian opera. I walked through many doors that had been opened to me by my teachers, doors they hadn't walked through themselves.

Because of my Latin teacher, Mrs. Ethel Snell, I thought I had to go look at the ruins of the Roman Forum for myself. It seemed a just reward for learning all those irregular verbs. And besides, here in Macon County, Mrs. Snell exhibited the grandeur and the beauty of a noble Roman matron, and she brought a dead language to life. And she did not make it optional.

I was hungriest of all for a glimpse of what was then the great American metropolis: New York City. And so I mowed the yards and raked the leaves of Decatur, Illinois, to pay for a trip to New York when I was sixteen. And when I first saw New York through eyes that had seen very little else, I knew that was the place for me, even before I realized it was the publishing center of the country.

You must be very careful what you wish for. You almost always get it.

I studied to be an English teacher because the worthy and demanding people who taught in this town left me with the idea that the only field open to English majors was teaching. So I was a teacher for a long time, as long as I could be. I'd be a teacher yet if I'd been allowed to teach as I'd been taught.

But like a great many other people in this room, I ran afoul of the 1960's: the age when English teachers were expected to dump their curricula in favor of becoming psychiatric social workers, in the absence of the Latin teacher who'd been thrown out into the street by an angry anti-intellectual mob composed of children and school administrators.

It was a time when the old textbook anthology of selected traditional readings went out the window. In New York it went out the window literally. And because nature abhors a vacuum, this hiatus of subject matter was partially filled by a new literary form.

First a trend and now a tradition — a field for the "Young Adult" began to attract writers. Novels about the lives and the lifestyles, the real problems and the wished-for triumphs of early adolescence began to appear: stories of morality and wish-fulfillment, of escape and companionship. These books were produced not by the old textbook houses like Scott, Foresman who were running scared because they had little to offer a teacher who'd been robbed of authority, but by the trade divisions of publishing houses who competed freely for the copious leisure time of the young.

Suddenly we had a literature of puberty. The first books were pretty primitive pioneer efforts. In the year I turned in my pension plan, 1971, most books for adolescents were on three topics: drugs, racial identity, and protest politics.

But I'd just walked out of an elitist school on Park Avenue where the 13-year-old drug addicts weren't reading and didn't have to — a school forcibly integrated by adults on one day and forcibly segregated by the students on the day after that, a school where students, excused to march on Washington as pacificists, were beating each other up in the washroom.

And so I quit this non-school to write novels, not to the leaders of this corrosive, self-deluding youth culture, but to their victims, the quiet students at the back of the class who'd never met the guidance counselor because they weren't in the kind of trouble that adults give heed to.

I began writing for a living after thirty-seven years of being told there isn't a living in it. There is. I sold the first line of fiction I ever wrote. And I began with a book — now eight books — not about the transitory surfaces of the contemporary youth scene, but about the timeless needs of being young: of surviving the conformity of peers and escaping from the grimness of not being as old as you wish you were.

In the books I write for the thoughtful, still hopeful young people I once knew as a teacher, I try against all odds to make common cause with a generation growing up without the advantages we elders took for granted in towns like Decatur, Illinois. Mine was the last generation to reach puberty without television, and so we viewed the world on an immensely larger screen. Mine was nearly the last generation to be able to flunk a course, a fate which turns out to be not nearly so ruinous as to remain illiterate and to be given credit for nothing. In my day far too many people went to

college without knowing why. Yet the college admissions requirements kept our noses to the grindstone, our teachers in control, and ourselves off the streets. A vanished world, even here.

And so you and I, in reaching for the young, must function in a welter of worlds we never lived in. And when we turn to autobiography, our young readers and students will change the channel and turn us into test patterns.

Readers aren't looking for the author in a book. They're looking for themselves. And this goes double for young readers. No book for the young can ever presume to say, "When I was *your* age . . . ," because in all the ways that work, we never really were. And besides, what we remember best never really happened.

Authors rarely dare be as introspective as they're thought to be. I have to spend a great part of my time tracking down the young. I keep notebooks of youthful speech patterns because the slang of Stephen Decatur High School in the year 1952 no longer computes. Each day you and I grow older, but our young people remain the same age. It's a curious sensation to have neckties older than your readers.

And yet we have to keep pace with a youth culture that changes its protective coloring every season. And this requires footwork, eavesdropping, and research. Fortunately my teachers from junior high to graduate school taught me research methods. They showed me methods of extracting information, and fortunately none of them ever encouraged me to express myself. That would have embarrassed us both, back in the days before I had a self to express.

A writer, like a teacher, is expected to be everywhere at once. I come home to you tonight directly from a place I never dreamed to see. The day before yesterday I was a visitor to a strange planet, the dream factory of Walt Disney Studios in Burbank, California. I was there because they've filmed their distorted version of a novel of mine called *The Ghost Belonged to Me* for a program called "The Wonderful World of Disney." When I found out what they'd done to my novel, I thought Disney's world was not nearly as wonderful as they think it is.

Though I'm wary of autobiography, I return to varying visions of Decatur, Illinois, for the settings of many of my books. Not a very literal Decatur, of course, because I write for young people who live in very different settings: the suburbs of distant cities and young readers in Denmark and Holland and England and South Africa and Germany. But it pleases me to try to capture the lifestyle, the quaint speech patterns, and the traditions of this midwestern place.

And here I labor uphill. The New York publishers can't quite visualize a people as exotic as Illinoisans. If we all lived in Lake Forest, they could dimly peg us. If we all lived in that Southside intellectual ghetto surrounding the University of Chicago, they would nod knowingly. If we all lived across the river behind the levee of Hannibal, Missouri, the name would ring a faint bell in their minds.

We don't have much visibility to the Californians either. I set my novel, *The Ghost Belonged to Me*, in my vision of Decatur circa 1913. The grandiose home of the Millikin family still standing on West Main Street became the home of the Armsworth family of my novel. The barn behind that home where my generation used to take art classes becomes in the novel a place haunted by the ghost of a girl lost in the Civil War. The social customs that obtained specifically in a small, bustling midwestern town shortly after Progress had been invented arose out of my vision of this place, these roots.

But Walt Disney Productions, for all their inventiveness, cannot visualize such a place. They've set my novel in a decaying antebellum farmhouse in rural Kentucky. And they've replaced my period setting with a modern one, full of station wagons and children who, when encountering a ghost say, "Far out!" like miniature John Denvers.

But the book writer had better take all this philosophically. I don't write for adult film makers. I don't write for adult book reviewers. I don't write for parents for the unhappy reason that, despite what they say, they aren't much interested in what their children read. I don't write for my New York publishers, nor for any of the people who were young when I was.

I write for a group of young people who were born after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, a group of people for whom the Viet Nam War is an archaeological site yet to be excavated. I write for victims of progressive education and the survivors of the permissive home.

I write in the hope that books and teachers will trigger in them a lifetime habit of reading that will mature with the taste of the reader.

The trends of television on one coast and publishing on the other are not the major stumbling blocks in your life's work and mine. Our great problems are these:

The link between reading and writing has been broken in our children's education, so that they've become critics and not creators.

Our problem is not non-stop television; it's the home where children never see their own parents reading, as a badge of maturity and independence. In defense of television, Eric Severeid once said that it is the only coherent, intelligent voice ever heard in many homes.

Our problem is the crime wave directed against the young by the young that makes them too fearful to venture out into a wider world.

Our problem is a civilization in sunset where the gymnasium is larger than the library.

Our problem is a bloated bureaucracy of school administrators who regard teachers as enemies and children as aliens.

And the ultimate problem of our times is the youngster who is too sure he is right because he has read nothing to the contrary.

I'm grateful for the chance to get these problems temporarily off my chest. Midwestern people are people of the word — skeptical and precise. They spare themselves the posturing of the people in those noisier and more pretentious places where my books and I struggle to be heard. You teachers are the people who will put the right book in the right young hand as a stake in the future. Thank you for doing your job and for the encouragement you offer to writers and readers alike.

Charlotte's Web: A Study in Excellence

PETER NEUMEYER
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WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY
MORGANTOWN, WEST VIRGINIA

EDITOR'S NOTE: Peter Neumeyer spoke in response to the question, "What makes a good children's book good?" at the March meeting of the Children's Literature Association, held last year in Ypsilanti, Michigan. At that time, he discussed the use of the word in Beatrix Potter, Paul Zindel, and E. B. White. Part of that address was printed in the May 1977 *English Journal*. Since then, Professor Neumeyer has expanded his analysis of *Charlotte's Web*. What follows is the conclusion of his analysis, here published for the first time.

Charlotte's Web, both according to the author's oft-stated intent, and from ample internal evidence, is in the mainstream of Western literary tradition. Employing the temporal device of the changing

of the seasons, which in turn signals the archetypical concept of rebirth, *Charlotte's Web* is a pastoral idyll with lyrical intermezzos.

Of White's intent, there is no doubt. The story itself is clear enough, but the recently published letters underline the author's awareness of his own purpose.

In 1938 the Whites moved from New York to North Brooklin, Maine, and there began their decades of intimate and affectionate commerce with their geese, pigs, rats, spiders, and their beloved barn. They had lived there already for thirteen years, when March 1, 1951, White wrote Ursula Nordstrom, the famed children's editor at Harpers, that *Charlotte's Web* had been completed, and was being set aside to gel for a year.

White's book, as it turned out, was only the last of a genus that we are able to trace for nearly three millenia.

Hesiod, in the ninth century B.C., viewing himself as already living late in the iron age, wrote with clear eye of the daily round of the farm. Six centuries later the Theocritan idyllic view of the pastoral bloomed, giving rise in its turn to the partly misty, partly realistic vision of Virgil in his Eclogues. The view the ancient poets held of nature was, for close to a thousand years, mixed, at times a sentimental idealization of nature, and at other times a shrewd and practical assessment. The round of the seasons would be viewed in a silver sheen in the 18th century in Thomson's "The Seasons" — that long neoclassical contemplation that was to inspire Haydn too. White's "seasons" are not dissimilar from those of Thomson and Haydn, and as with Haydn too, it is to the mirror, the incidental tunes of the changing seasons that many of the mirror lyrics, what I call the lyrical intermezzos, of the book are dedicated.

Mid-plot and action, in Chapter VI, we find,

> Early summer days are a jubilee time for birds. In the fields around the house, in the barn, in the woods, in the swamp — everywhere love and songs and nests and eggs. . . . On an apple bough, the phoebe teeters and wags it tail and says "Phoebe, phoe-bee!" The song sparrow, who knows how brief and lovely life is, says "Sweet, sweet, sweet interlude."... (p. 43)

Note in the above not only the exaltation of the seasons, but the melancholy theme of *"et in arcadia ego"* — in the midst of life, there comes death.

Such moodful contemplations of the time — of year or of day — pervade the book, as when Fern is at the barn and, though knowing it is suppertime, cannot bear to leave.

> Swallows passed on silent wings, in and out of the doorways, bringing food to their young ones. From across the road a bird sang "Whippoorwill, whippoorwill!" . . . he [Lurvy] loved life, and loved to be a part of the world on a summer evening. (p. 62)

Such a passage is kindred to Collins's odes, to Young's "Night Thoughts," and, by way of them, to the Roman, and through them, to the Greek pastoral.

The same chapter ends,

> "Good night, Charlotte" said Wilbur.
> "Good night, Wilbur!"
> There was a pause.
> "Good night, Charlotte!"
> "Good night, Wilbur!"
> "Good night!"
> "Good night."

The evening approaches. The night cometh. . . .

That the pastoral mode is employed in a child's story with one main character who is a child, is fitting too. Arcadian shepherds undoubtedly were pubescent, but the lost innocence infusing the arcadian myth also implies the child — or, as William Empson puts it, writing of *Alice in Wonderland*, "a shift onto the child, of the obscure tradition of the pastoral."

White himself made evident repeatedly in his letters that he conceived of the story as a rendering of the rural year. To cite only one instance in 1961, when Louis de Rochemont had first broached the notion of an animated version, White had already called it a "hymn to the barn." "It is," he wrote, "pastoral, seasonal, and is concerned with ordinary people in, for the most part, ordinary situations. The heroine dies, the summer ends, and when the story comes to a close, the girl, Fern, is a different girl — she has matured a little." (*Letters*, p. 481)

White himself called it, classically, a paean, which, by definition, was an ancient Greek hymn of thanksgiving. He was fully aware of what he wrought.

If further, minor, supporting evidence is needed for placing the little book in the classical tradition, let me remind you again not only of the obvious root of the Arable family name, but also the name of the one person who understands the intercourse between mankind and nature — Dr. Dorian. The Dorians, of course, were one of the populations of ancient Greece — (Attica) — in the eleventh century B.C. And, what I did not know, but as my Ox-

ford Dictionary surprisingly informs me, the word "Doric" refers also to "A broad or rustic dialect of English, Scotch."

Charlotte's Web is a book of the working and the rural seasons, in the Dorian-Attic mode, underscored even by the name of the choral interpreter of the book's primary and most magical mystery, by Dr. Dorian.

At least as significant in the generic placement of *Charlotte's Web* is its position in the archetypical genre: Life out of Death; Birth and Renewal out of the Ashes. That such a theme is kindred to the pastoral and seasonal goes without saying. Out of the Winter earth, the life of Spring.

Charlotte, herself, bears the burden of that primordial ritual as she weaves her web, lays her eggs, and at the end of the penultimate chapter, with all her little remaining strength "waved one of her front legs," as she whispered "Good-bye!"

Next chapter, the last one, the eggs hatch, the baby spiders feel the warm updraft, let loose their fine silk balloons, and sail out on the Spring breezes. "We're leaving here on the warm updraft," they call to Wilbur. "This is our moment for setting forth." (p. 179)

This quest theme is not new to White in *Charlotte's Web*, for he used it five years earlier, in the conclusion of the story of the adventures of the little mouse, Stuart Little, who, in that book's last paragraph,

> . . . rose from the ditch, climbed into his car, and started up the road that led toward the north. The sun was just coming up over the hills on his right. As he peered ahead into the great land that stretched before him, the way seemed long. But the sky was bright, and somehow he felt he was headed in the right direction.

Compare any number of tales in the great tradition — Huck Finn's last words, the long river voyage done, the old world left behind, "But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before." or the poignant conclusion of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve expelled from the Garden, easeful bliss left behind forever, and a world of strife, but also of adventure and the possibility for greatness ahead:

> The World was all before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
> They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow,
> Through Eden took thir solitary way.

That White himself saw the book similarly, in the tradition of tales of mortality out of which shall grow a greater life, and that

he would not have it otherwise, is attested by his repeated insistence, even at financial expense to himself, that the ending not be prettified. His letters bear constant witness. Just one example from 1969, to Ursula Nordstrom:

> P.S. The Disney organization tried for years to beat me down. I didn't beat, and Disney is dead. But he's still trying from the grave.
>
> (*Letters*, p. 585)

White withstood the repeated and misguided attempts to trivialize the story. Its great theme was its core. As White said of it truly in 1973, " 'Charlotte' was a story of friendship, life, death, salvation." (*Letters*, p. 645)

My original argument was that the quality, the excellence, of a children's book — in this case, of *Charlotte's Web* — is its "density" — a book with close warp, close woof, an author with many resources, and consequently a tale with a lot to consider by a reader with developed capacities.

Charlotte's Web is dense; it has rich texture. It is the product of a mind such as conceives great work, for it demonstrates many of the literary-spiritual resources of our civilization.

Charlotte's Web is a book in which the individual words mirror the rich history of the English language; a book in which even the characters' names evoke connotations of the cultures through which we have evolved; a book that uses words with nuance and humor; a book that exemplifies virtuosity in syntactic manipulation; a book in which the technical devices of writers, "foreshadowing," and the like, are used expertly, and in which the plot grows inevitably and inexorably out of the thoroughly developed characters of the tale; a book in which the author walks without wavering the narrow wire between coyness and warmth, between condescension and affection; a book in which the technical problem of how readers are eased into a willing suspension of disbelief at the miracle of animals talking is managed so flawlessly that the execution of the trick is such that only an expert can find the thin thread in the seemingly seamless garment of the narration; and — finally — *Charlotte's Web* is a great book because it has the one quality without which no book can possibly be great — it deals with significant issues of our brief and mysterious time on this lonely planet — it is a book that takes for its subject the celebration of the earth, its crops, its beasts, its children; a book that recognizes the inevitability of our death; and that states, for whatever solace we may find in the fact, that there will ever be new, brief travelers, new air-borne travelers, here for a season, then calling "good-bye," and blowing away on the warm updraft.

The Coming of Age of Fern in *Charlotte's Web*

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A sure-fire way of determining whether a young reader will enjoy, and even find useful, a novel is to apply to the work what Wayne Burns, a literary critic of some merit, calls the Panzaic principle. Named after Quixote's wise buffoon, Sancho Panza, the Panzaic principle holds that in any reaction to a work of fiction the responses of the stomach, the guts, are always right. What keeps a child interested in a novel and contributes heavily to making him an avid reader is the emotional intensity that the work generates — the "gut" response to the work.

We should not feel squeamish about a novel's appeal to the "panza" of a child; after all, child psychologists such as Bruno Bettelheim and Erik Erikson have assured us that children are not innocent angels, amorphous spirits, who must be protected from the real and the physical. Quite the contrary, children rightfully demand a realistic portrayal of their own psychological dynamics including their most violent, cruel urges.

E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, though not as Panzaic as *The Wild Things*, *Alice in Wonderland*, or the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales, appeals to a child because it confronts the realistic problems that children must deal with: battling with parents and other authority figures, gaining an identity, coping with evil and death. More importantly, the novel, like a good many fairy tales, offers solutions to these problems in a non-didactic way by providing useful models for a child to imitate: the qualities which Charlotte the spider possesses would be worthwhile for Fern the child to adopt.

The novel opens with Fern's father, axe in hand, going out to the hoghouse to kill a runt pig that he believes will never amount to anything. Fern, a vocal, willful, eight-year-old girl shrieks, "You mean [you're going to] kill it? Just because it's smaller than the other?" She scampers outdoors, catches up to her father, and can't help sobbing, "Please don't kill it! It's unfair." Her father counters that she must learn to control herself; but Fern, tears running down her cheeks, takes hold of the axe and tries to wrest it from her father's hands.

References are to the Harper and Row edition of *Charlotte's Web*, 1932.

In the first few pages of the story E. B. White, with the help of an excellent illustration by Garth Williams depicting Fern battling her father for the axe, presents his young readers with a character with whom they can readily identify and an experience which they can understand: what child hasn't battled with a parent over the right to keep some stray animal?

In addition, the novel introduces the topic of death in a strong and honest way. Fern intuitively realizes the unfairness of doing away with the pig just because it's small; but more importantly, she's cunning enough to stretch her father's logic for killing the pig to its breaking point: "If I had been very small at birth, would you have killed me? This is the most terrible case of injustice I ever heard of." (p. 3)

Clearly, the eight-year-old Fern identifies with the pig; all small creatures should come to the aid of each other in time of need. Fortunately, confronting a strong adult doesn't always result in defeat — a bit of news children are always grateful to hear. Fern's perceptive argument forces her father to change his mind; she is able to keep the pig, names him Wilbur, and quickly transforms him into "her infant."

One would think that the relationship between Fern and Wilbur would be the focus of the novel, but as the story progresses Fern takes a less active role in the action: she is conspicuously absent during Wilbur's hour of triumph at the fair.

In the opening chapters Fern continues to treat Wilbur as her child, even to the point of wheeling him around in a baby carriage with one of her dolls. But after only five weeks, her father insists that they sell the pig because it is becoming an economic burden. Fern can't come up with a convincing reason why Wilbur should stay; her victory over her father is short-lived.

A relative, Uncle Homer, purchases Wilbur, and Fern is allowed to visit the pig as often as she wants. She spends long hours watching Wilbur, and before long the other animals trust her. She develops a sympathetic relationship with the natural world. Rather suddenly, the narrative shifts its attention to Wilbur's relationship with the other farm animals, especially Templeton the rat and Charlotte the spider, and we now learn very little about Fern's thoughts and interests.

Does Fern drop out of the novel? E. B. White is careful to weave into the narrative short descriptions of Fern sitting on her stool observing the animals (p. 62), heading for home with "her mind full of everything that she had seen and heard" in the barn (p. 65), and even wishing that the barn wasn't full of people (Charlotte has implemented her plan to save Wilbur and it has

attracted much attention) so she could be alone with the animals. (p. 85) The barnyard contains a society complete in itself, and Fern understands the complex interplay of animal personalities in the barn.

Not surprisingly, the members of that society, particularly Charlotte, provide Fern with useful role models to imitate. Although Charlotte's blood-lust may be initially a bit distasteful to a few young readers: " 'I drink them [insects] — drink their blood. I love blood,' said Charlotte, and her pleasant, thin voice grew even thinner and more pleasant" (p. 39), she counteracts Wilbur's horror of her dining habits by saying that she has "to say what is true."

Underneath her seemingly cruel exterior, Charlotte is honest, sharp, and clever. More than that, she is willing to devote almost all her energies and wits to saving Wilbur from the hatchet or a slug from Mr. Arable's .22. She is patient in devising a plan to save the pig, and comforts him when the thought of death almost overcomes him. By observing how Charlotte and the barnyard animals effectively resolve these perplexing problems, Fern is learning to confront death, loneliness, and other problems which she must learn to cope with before entering the adult world.

On the other hand, the adult world is not sympathetic to nor does it understand Fern's sensibilities, and, even worse, it is populated by fools who are easily tricked by Charlotte's plan to save Wilbur. Fern and Wilbur learn from an old sheep that around Christmastime Mr. Arable customarily shoots the spring pig; Wilbur quickly realizes that he will be Mr. Arable's target this winter. Fern's mother, oblivious of her daughter's sensitive nature, does not see why Fern is spending so much time with the animals. Because she is "inventing wild tales" about talking spiders, Mrs. Arable thinks that Fern needs to see a doctor.

Dr. Dorian, the only sympathetic adult in the novel, thinks that Fern's fascination with animals is "enchanting," but that she'll eventually grow out of her interest in the barnyard. From all over the state foolish adults are duped by Charlotte's web-writing act; the spider correctly comments that "people believe almost anything they see in print." (p. 89) Even the minister succumbs to Charlotte's trickery and tries to explain "the miracle" of the spider web as a supernatural sign "that human beings must always be on the watch for the coming of wonder." (p. 85) Adults continually make fatuous comments about the writing on the web, and Fern, instead of taking the adult world seriously, is amused by its gullibility.

Charlotte's Web does not simplify the dynamics of problem-solving; Charlotte is not a super-spider who can dupe the adult world by herself. The novel clearly points out that insidious creatures

such as Templeton the rat are necessary if Charlotte is to save Wilbur: evil does exist in the world and it can be turned to useful means if it is handled properly.

Templeton, unlike Charlotte, is concerned with instinctual gratification only: "The rat had no morals, no conscience, no scruples, no consideration, no decency, no milk of rodent kindness, no compunctions, no higher feeling, no friendliness, no anything. He would kill a gosling if he could get away with it . . ." (p. 46) Despite the fact that the rat is a threat because he literally lives for his stomach, the animal society, especially the sheep and Charlotte, realize that he is a necessary part of their social structure. After all, Templeton does gather the words "radiant" and "humble" that Charlotte weaves on her web, he saves Charlotte's life by scaring off Avery with a rotten goose egg, and he gets Wilbur back on his feet by biting his tail after he has fainted away at the special awards ceremony. His most important accomplishment is snipping Charlotte's egg sac from the top of the pig cage so Wilbur can bring the sac back to the barn and protect it until spring when Charlotte's children will emerge.

Adult society in the novel doesn't realize the value of instinctual gratification and continually tries to prevent children from enjoying themselves. For example, the best swing in the county hangs in Zuckerman's barn, but parents, particularly mothers, are terrified that some children will fall off: "Children almost always hang onto things tighter than their parents think they will." (p. 69) Even at the fair Avery and Fern are harassed by endless lists of "don'ts" before they can escape into the midway: " 'Don't spend it [money] all in one place'; 'Don't eat a lot of stuff that's going to make you sick to your stomachs'; 'Don't get lost'; 'Don't get dirty'; 'Don't get overheated.' " (p. 131)

Fortunately, the midway, a perfect place for a child to indulge in instinctual gratification, is an area "where there would be no parents to guard them and guide them, and where they could be happy and free and do as they pleased." (p. 131)

However, at some time during their lives children must learn to control the instinctual forces that often threaten to overwhelm them. The barnyard society recognizes the validity and need for such forces, but uses a series of checks to prevent Templeton from being a menace to their community. Significantly, the adult world in the novel does not contain a Templeton, a personification of instinctual drives, that in some way must be controlled. Consequently, Fern can only rely on her observations in the barnyard to provide her with useful models for the control of her instincts.

Towards the end of *Charlotte's Web* Fern does in a sense "drop out" of the novel, but it would be more accurate to say that she "develops out" of her interest in animals to a new interest in Henry Fussy. Without doubt Charlotte and some of the other barnyard animals provide Fern with a useful set of values that adult society does not possess. Now Fern must go out into the world and make use of those values.

Fern's interest in Henry represents the first step in a long process of maturation. That first step meets with approval from her mother because she now sees that Fern is no longer exclusively interested in Wilbur but is starting to duplicate the same type of growing up process that she underwent. The change taking place in Fern is evident on the day of the fair. She lugs a pail of hot water up to her room to take a sponge bath and even puts on an attractive dress because she knows that boys will be at the fair. Up to this point she has been content to sit next to the squalid pigpen; her sudden desire to be clean and her wish to put on a dress (Williams' illustrations make her look like a tom-boy) indicate a transfer of attention from the animal world to the social world.

Fern had spent her happiest moments and almost all her free time at Zuckerman's barn; but after her Ferris wheel ride with Henry, she believes that "the most fun there is... is when the Ferris wheel stops and Henry and I are in the top car and Henry makes the car swing and we can see everything for miles and miles and miles." (p. 173) Although she still cares to some degree about Wilbur and the animal world (she's the first to notice when Wilbur is sick), her interest in Henry is so pervasive that she misses the awarding of Wilbur's special prize because she desperately wants some money from her mother so that she can go on another Ferris wheel ride with Henry.

By the end of the novel Fern rarely visits the barn; she is very much concerned about growing up and is "careful to avoid childish things, like sitting on a milk stool near a pigeon." (p. 183) But the reader senses that Fern will not forget the lessons about death, evil, and adults that she learned at the barnyard. Though she's now careful to avoid "childish" things, hopefully she will retain some of the "child" in her.

E. B. White squarely faces the problem that parents are not always tolerant or interested in what their children are doing and why they're doing it. Consequently, *Charlotte's Web* portrays adult relations to children in a way that children can easily recognize, understand, and possibly apply to their own lives.

Aside from treating the serious themes of coming of age, death, and evil, the novel is intricately structured. White utilizes the

mythic seasonal movements to reinforce the birth-death-rebirth cycle of the animals' lives. In addition, the language is so rich and the writing so well composed that the novel's form provides both a model for student writing and a norm for the quality of their reading. Adults as well as children are now having a difficult time finding appropriate models to imitate, but E. B. White and Charlotte, artists in their own right, have given their respective audience an esthetic ideal to strive for.

Johnny Tremain and *My Brother Sam Is Dead*: Two Views of the American Revolution

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Attitudes toward war have changed remarkably in one generation. The change is sharply evident in current history and literature: the novels written for children during World War II are different from those of the past ten years.

This difference can be seen in two outstanding books: *Johnny Tremain,* written by Esther Forbes in 1943, and *My Brother Sam Is Dead,* written by two brothers, James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier, in 1974. Both books deal with the American Revolution, yet a close examination of each reveals a basic contrast in attitudes toward both the Revolutionary War and war in general. Once war seemed important and necessary; now many people think that there must be a better way to solve political and social problems.

These two novels with effective messages about war are of high literary quality. *Johnny Tremain,* a Newbery Medal winner, is noted for its characterization. Johnny is believable because he has many human frailties: he is arrogant and proud before his accident and moody and resentful afterwards. However, he has courage, determination and loyalty — qualities that children and adults can admire and respect. Esther Forbes has created action that captures

Quotations will be from the 1968 paperback edition of *Johnny Tremain* (1968) and from the 1974 edition of *My Brother Sam Is Dead,* Four Winds Press.

and holds the interest of the reader as the plot builds logically from the first chapter. Even at that point there is foreboding, a premonition that all will not be well, as the three boys, Dove, Dusty, and Johnny, are described and their attitudes toward each other become evident. That premonition increases when Mr. Lapham has Johnny read from the Bible, "Pride goeth before a fall," and later comments that "God is going to send you a dire punishment for your pride." Foreshadowing is also used much later when James Otis speaks to the Observers and, looking at Rab, states: " 'some will give their lives. All the years of their maturity. All the children they never live to have. The serenity of old age. To die so young is more than merely dying; it is to lose so large a part of life.' " (p. 180) This technique helps to hold the story together, to strengthen it, especially since the Lyte episodes tend to be digressive and rather melodramatic

Throughout the story, Esther Forbes is careful to present a balanced picture whenever possible. On page 115 she refers to "a courageous Tory." When the port of Boston is closed, she comments that the Tories, too, were hurt as much as the Whigs. Later, when Rab touches a British soldier's gun and is struck down as a result, a British medical officer tells Rab and Johnny: " 'You remember that *we* don't like being here in Boston any better than you like having us. I'd rather be with my wife and children in Bath.' " (p. 133)

The setting in *Johnny Tremain* comes alive under Esther Forbes' pen. The homes, shops, crowded streets, and the smells and sounds of Boston as well as the sights fill the mind of the reader. A new understanding of the times, far different from that gained from any history text, emerges. An understanding of how people lived and worked and what they thought and felt comes about as a result of Forbes' ability to evoke the period, to bring it vividly to life. Her theme, "a man can stand up," is the strong unifying force that, along with her characterization, makes her book ring true and holds the reader's attention to the very end. Her style, too, with its emphasis on dialogue and descriptive action, keeps readers engrossed; they care what happens to Johnny, Rab, Cilla, and the rest, and at the same time they are gaining an awareness of history. They will remember *Johnny Tremain* for a long time.

My Brother Sam Is Dead also withstands close scrutiny. Again characterization is excellent. The story is a first-person account by Sam's younger brother, Tim, who is torn by the conflict within his family. His brother, Sam, has joined the Minutemen, but his father is a loyalist, a Tory. Tim idolizes Sam, but at the same time he loves and respects his father. When questioned, Tim, loyalties divided,

feels put on the spot: "I didn't want to lie to Father, but I didn't want to give Sam away, either." During a fiery church sermon he worries that God will strike down his brother; he is confused himself over which side is right. When Sam steals his father's gun and Tim finds out, again Tim is in the middle as Sam extracts a promise from him not to tell.

The setting has a profound influence on the characters. Sam has been a student at Yale, quite a contrast to Redding, his hometown: " 'There's a lot more Tories in this part of Connecticut than in the rest of the Colonies. In New Haven there aren't so many Loyalists and in some towns there aren't any at all.' " (p. 6) Sam has become enflamed with the talk of liberty and freedom and has joined Captain Benedict Arnold's Company. In Redding, sympathies are different, although it is not completely Tory by any means. Tim vacillates between the two positions. When the British troops march into Redding, Tim admires them. When they drag off little Jerry Sanford along with Captain Betts and Mr. Rogers, he begins to have doubts, and when he witnesses the fight at Captain Starr's house and sees Ned stabbed and beheaded, it is too much for him: "I didn't feel much like being a Tory anymore." (p. 145) As conditions deteriorate in Redding (equipment, supplies, and food are hard to come by), the reader sees the effect on other characters, too. Mrs. Meeker, chided about her patriotism, responds:

> Bah, patriotism. Your patriotism has got my husband in prison and one of my children out there in the rain and the muck shooting people and likely to be dead at any minute, and my business half ruined. Go sell your patriotism elsewhere, I've had enough of it. (p. 149)

The plot of *My Brother Sam Is Dead* is carefully constructed to show both sides, but more than that, as episode piles on episode, the anti-war theme emerges. Tim's father has been opposed to war from the very beginning of the book (see page 21 for his vivid description of war), an attitude that is reinforced, not changed, as the action progresses. Although Tim, at times, gets carried away by Sam's patriotic fervor, much later he becomes aware of Sam's real motive for staying in the army:

> He was staying in the army because he *wanted* to stay in the army, not because of duty or anything else. He liked the excitement of it . . . he was part of something big, he thought that what he was doing was important. It felt good to be part of it, and I knew that was the real reason why he didn't want to come home. (pp. 162-3)

Shortly after, Tim learns of his father's death on a British prison ship and hears what his last words were: " 'And now I go to enjoy

the freedom war has brought me.' " (p. 165) This death was followed by news of the death of ten-year-old Jerry Sanford, also aboard a prison ship.

As the years pass, other characters begin to change their attitudes. Betsy, Sam's girl friend and staunch supporter originally, has second thoughts about the war, after hearing of Jerry Sanford's death. She finally believes that Sam should come home after all and comments, " 'I don't care who wins any more. I just want it to be over.' " (p. 167) As Tim thinks about that and about all that has happened, he decides that neither side is right.

These changes in attitude are a logical development because of the way the Colliers approached their subject and constructed their plot. They deliberately selected events that would portray their own attitudes best, events that culminate in Sam's imprisonment and then death for a crime he did not commit. As a result the reader, with attitudes beginning to waver, might well wonder, along with Tim Meeker at the end, "that there might have been another way, besides war, to achieve the same end." (p. 211)

The first-person narration was a perfect choice for *My Brother Sam Is Dead*. The reader, through Tim's eyes, can see what happens to the people around him, can feel torn as he is with conflicting emotions and loyalties. This is far more effective than having an omniscient observer, for Tim is young, not fully formed yet in body or spirit, and the reader can side with his longings and misgivings. The result is a much more impassioned story as it comes from Tim's own lips. The dialogue has a ring of truth to it, and even the descriptive passages, with their basically simple sentence structures, sound as if they, too, came from the lips of the boy.

The Epilogue does explain that Tim is writing this account when he is sixty-four years old; any variations from the simple sentence structure can be accounted for through a temporary lapse while he remembers. Indeed, the Epilogue itself reflects a more mature writing style; the sentences tend to be longer more frequently than were those in the rest of the book.

A study of *Johnny Tremain* and *My Brother Sam Is Dead*, then, reveals that these novels are of excellent literary quality, books which can be taken seriously and which the reader can become absorbed in. Although both deal with the American Revolution, there is a basic difference in attitude towards war, no doubt a reflection of the times during which each book was written.

Johnny Tremain was published in 1943, a time when the United States was immersed in another war that was supported with a great deal of patriotic fervor by most of the people. The majority

were concerned with helping the war effort: many families grew victory gardens; women went to work in defense plants, factories, and hospitals; and most of the eligible men went off to fight. There was a feeling of unity in the air, of knowing that our side was in the right and had to prevail. These attitudes could not help permeating Esther Forbes' consciousness, as demonstrated in these lines: " 'We are lucky men . . . for we have a cause worth dying for.' " (p. 179) In contrast to that, look again at the last sentence of the Colliers' book: "But somehow, even fifty years later, I keep thinking that there might have been another way, besides war, to achieve the same end." (p. 211)

The Colliers' attitudes, as revealed in *My Brother Sam Is Dead,* have obviously been colored by our involvement in Vietnam and the vivid accounts we have had of that war through newspapers, radio, and especially television. The napalm raids, the bombings, the search-and-destroy missions, all were given wide publicity, until a majority of Americans came to realize the horrors of that war. Closer looks were taken at other wars we had fought, and even children began to discover through new books what had occurred: *Summer of My German Soldier* (1973) by Bette Greene shows that there were prisoner-of-war camps in the United States, and *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973) is Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's own story of her family's internment in a camp during World War II because they were Japanese-Americans. Therefore, it is not surprising that a book like *My Brother Sam Is Dead* came to be written. Sam died for a crime he did not commit because he had to be made an example of:

> "He [General Putnam] is determined to scare the wits out of the troops to keep them in line. And he's thinking that it doesn't matter very much who he executes to do it. So many men have died, so many mothers have wept, so many brothers and sisters have cried. He is thinking that in the long run if he executes somebody, he'll shorten the war and save more lives." (p. 194)

This same kind of thinking went into the execution of Private Slovik during World War II and into the dropping of the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Today those events are the subject of much dispute because of the shedding of unnecessary blood, because of the moral issues involved. Such issues are obviously part of the consciousness of James Lincoln and Christopher Collier.

In *My Brother Sam Is Dead* there are not just two opposing views of the political situation, but several. Although Sam's father is a Tory, he does not feel that his is a cause worth dying for:

> "You never get rid of injustices by fighting. Look at Europe, they've had one war after another for hundreds of years, and show me where anything ever got better for them." (p. 28)

Even though Sam keeps talking about fighting for liberty, freedom, and principles, another basic reason for his joining the Minutemen comes out in a conversation when Tim asks him why he didn't stay in college: " 'I couldn't, Tim. How could I not go when all of my friends were going?' " (p. 58)

In *Johnny Tremain,* however, there are just two opposing views: that of the Whigs, who believed that taxation without representation is tyranny, and that of the Tories, who felt that all differences can be settled with time, patience, and respect for government. Johnny, unlike Tim, has little trouble deciding which side he will be on:

> By reading the papers, talking to Rab and Uncle Lorne, listening to the leaders of opposition about Boston, he quickly became well informed. In only a few weeks he changed from knowing little enough about the political excitement, and caring less, to being an ardent Whig. (p. 94)

But more important than side-taking in *Johnny Tremain* is the idea that war can be glorious. The character who stated that he considered himself lucky . . . for having a cause worth dying for adds: "This honor is not given to every generation." (p. 179) Obviously, Esther Forbes was reflecting a sentiment prevalent during World War II. She wrote from the point of view of the forties when she has a character say: "Some of us (will) die — so other men can stand up on their feet like men. A great many are going to die for that. They have in the past. They will a hundred years from now — two hundred. God grant there will always be men good enough." (p. 253) The Collier brothers also realized that men have fought for hundreds of years, but from their perspective of the seventies, fighting no longer seems to be the wonderful solution it had been. For them, somehow there must be a better way. Their attitude is reflected in *My Brother Sam Is Dead.*

Readers of these two historical novels on the American Revolution are, then, left to ponder: is fighting for a cause and dying for it the right thing to do? The chauvinistic attitudes of the forties have given way to the skepticism of the seventies — to a new stress on the value of a human life — leaving young readers with ethical questions that would not have occurred to them decades ago.

Sweet and Sour Land: A Critical Comparison of the "Sounder" Novels

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Published two years after his 1970 Newbery Medal Winner, *Sounder,* William Armstrong's novel, *Sour Land,* depicts the relations between an elderly Black school teacher, Moses Waters, and a Southern White farm family, the Stones. We discover, late in *Sour Land,* that Moses Waters was the boy in *Sounder.*

In accepting the award for *Sounder,* Armstrong described what he had considered good reading as a child. He chose Bible stories because "everything that could possibly be omitted was omitted," giving freedom to the reader's imagination. In *Sounder,* Armstrong clearly attempted to adopt the principle of omission, achieving through this and other means what *The Horn Book* reviewer describes as "an epic quality." *Sour Land* has quite a different quality; it has been described as "elegiac."

By investigating stylistic choices and effects in general, with particular attention to the formal and structural sources of these two different qualities, epic and elegiac, one can find keys to what makes *Sounder* a book appealing to both children and adults, a classic, if you will. The same process seems to lead to the conclusion that *Sour Land* is not really a children's book at all, but rather has the characteristics and appeal of adult fiction. For the literary critic, the investigation itself is of great interest; for the teacher and librarian, the conclusions can be also of practical value.

The literary adjectives, "epic" and "elegiac," suggest both stylistic and substantive differences between *Sounder* and *Sour Land:* "epic" usually designates an heroic story with a kind of "grand simplicity"; elegiac implies not only a poetic meditation upon the dead and death, but also perhaps a more ornamented style. The principle of omission in *Sounder* contributes especially to an impression of epic simplicity in keeping with the economy and leanness of the lives of the sympathetic characters. *Sour Land* is quite different in this matter of simplicity.

Quotations will be from the Harper and Row editions.

There is, for instance, the small but striking question of names. Noticeable in *Sounder* is the omission of proper names for any characters except the great coon dog. Sounder's distinctive proper name reflects the dignity and value of this "human animal." His silence throughout the major part of the story is tragically enhanced by it. Meanwhile, the generic names — "man," "woman," "boy" — universalize the human characters, *not only* reflecting this family's anonymity and invisibility in the eyes of the hostile Whites, but somehow, triumphantly transcending that hostility so that Sounder's owners become not less than themselves but more: the human family itself, in adversity.

Contrast to this *Sour Land,* where Armstrong adds rather than takes away. Even though names at first seem realistic, a rather traditional and literary name symbolism is at work, operating both by allusion — mainly to Biblical types — and by connotations that are also religious. Moses Waters, significantly named for the Old Testament lawgiver, comments favorably on the given names of the Stone children: David, Jonathan, and Ruth. These Biblical names designate certain relationships later played out in *Sour Land.* Anson's friend, Enoch Morris, too is like the Biblical Enoch, who "walked with God."

Also some of the prominent last names have significant connotations. Anson, although not hard, is somewhat stonelike in his grief over his wife's recent death; he is softened in his loneliness by his meeting with Moses Waters, whose last name has associations in scriptural exegesis with the mercy of God. Both the Old Testament emphasis on justice in the name Moses and the connection of his last name with the New Testament emphasis on mercy come together in the clear Christ symbolism at the end of the novel. Opposed to Moses are not only the, ironically, lawless Lawhorns, but also Reubin Flint, whose last name is invariably associated in religious symbolism with hardness of heart in denial of God.

This difference in name-giving is just one of many differences in form that seem connected almost organically with the nature of the lives depicted in the two books. Unlike the Stones, who are White property owners, the Black tenant farmer's family is deprived of both communal and familial contacts by its isolated situation (imposed by the White landowner) and the father's imprisonment.

Naturally there are fewer characters, less dialogue, and fewer plot complications in *Sounder.* Yet, although these differences seem like only a "natural" reflection of reality, if we think back on the question of naming and go on to examine other elements of the stylistic texture and structure of the two books, we will discover that Armstrong is making certain basic choices that do not simply

reflect reality mimetically but shape and shade it to bring into relief important elements.

One of the basic choices that a writer can make lies in what is technically known as "point of view," i.e., in the nature of the narrator and of the consciousness to which the reader has access. In both books, there is a third-person narrator, but in *Sounder* only that which is available to the consciousness of the boy is available to the reader. The reader of *Sour Land* is occasionally permitted to witness things that Anson cannot see, but Anson's consciousness is the only one consistently accessible to the reader. The boy is a child and Black; Anson Stone is an adult and White.

The consequences that arise from the choice of these different central consciousnesses are as clear and pervasive as those that arise from reality itself. *Sounder* becomes an exercise in artistic identification and empathy; *Sour Land* takes the traditional elegiac stance. Anson (and to some extent Enoch) takes on the role of elegiast. The usual elegiac distance between the live venerator and the dead venerated is made even more striking in *Sour Land* by the obvious fact that the venerating consciousness is that of a youngish Southern White man and employer of the venerated older Black man.

The results of the choice of consciousness are many. It is a cliché that the consciousness of the child has a sensory acuteness lost to the adult. Certainly the consciousness of the boy in *Sounder* has been sharpened rather than blunted by deprivation and solitude. Separated by age and responsibility from his siblings, he lives in a well of loneliness with the nearest school eight busless miles away, but his sensitivity magnifies the small sensory and intellectual stimuli and pleasures that come his way and the reader experiences through him the simple joys — and stark horrors — of his life.

Characteristic of *Sounder* throughout, in contrast to the fuller dialogue and plot action in *Sour Land*, are long descriptive passages (such as one about the sound of Sounder's voice or another about the smell of clean laundry on the line) that arise mainly from the nature of the boy's acute consciousness and its development. These passages are not in contradiction with the epic grand simplicity but, like the epic simile, are not only evocative but "economical," in the literary sense of accomplishing many communicative tasks at once and gathering up many associations with other aspects of the work. Moreover, the boy's sensitivity, as epitomized in these descriptive passages, emphasizes human ties and subtle familial communication, calling the reader's attention to the meaning of the mother's tense humming, the father's talking to the sun

and the wind, and particularly, to all the silences of the boy's existence.

Silence becomes a *leitmotif* in *Sounder:* the silence of the family's isolation from and lack of communication with the outside world, the mother's suffering silence broken only by snatches of the Lonely Road song, the silence of Sounder's voice. The boy's own silence in the face of abuse is the most meaningful of all, for it masks an heroic passive resistance — in the great tradition of Gandhi and Martin Luther King — that is *the* epic heroism of the book. Armstrong is masterful in depicting its sources: to a very small extent in the physical competence of the father, to a larger extent in the Biblical tradition of the mother, and most of all in the boy's own extraordinarily vivid imaginative ability to sublimate retributive aggression that might otherwise have destroyed both body and soul. The silent fantasies of beasts being slaughtered that the boy trains upon the bestial wardens (pp. 60, 67, 69, 87) are positively cathartic and make it possible for the boy — and the child or adult reader — to endure and transcend that bestiality rather than descend to it.

The major part of the boy's fantasy life is fortunately more positive; it stems largely from the Biblical tradition that his mother passes down to him. Particularly captivating to him are what might be called Old Testament "success stories," those about David and about Joseph, who went from impotence to power. These very teachings of his mother, filtered through his consciousness, permit him to transform her silent endurance into an inspired quest, not only for his father but for learning. In the process, he finds the school teacher, who becomes a spiritual father to him as well. With great economy, Armstrong shows in the teacher's life style the direction in which the boy's growth and development will continue: with firm roots in the soil, he will not reject his heritage but will build upon it. He will see the true values in both his parents' and teacher's lives and combine them.

Along the way, neither he nor the reader can escape suffering. In particular, we watch the father's return through the boy's eyes. It is, of course, in great contrast with the joyful returns of aristocratic and middle class White fathers in many well-known children's books: *The Secret Garden* or *The Railway Children,* for instance. With the boy, we watch the speck on the road becoming larger and larger:

> Sometimes it seemed to be a person dragging something.... Once or twice they thought it might be a brown cow or mule, dragging its hooves in the sand and raising and lowering its weary head.... Now it appeared to be a child carrying something on its back and limping. (p. 106)

We recall, chokingly, an earlier passage in which the boy watches the men in the chain gang and thinks, "He wished they would stand up and walk. Then he would know his father easily by his walk." (p. 85)

The boy's father is returning from long years in prison. Although this is not the traditional triumphant homecoming, there is yet triumph at the end of the book — triumph almost entirely spiritual. And the most subtle triumph of all lies in the development of the boy's consciousness. His development has gone beyond his father: he will no longer go hunting with him. (p. 111) But, somehow, the boy has encompassed his father within himself and integrated his background with the wisdom of the "torn book" (Montaigne's *Essays*) that he has rescued from the garbage, which says, "Only the unwise think that what has changed is dead." (p. 114)

As the last paragraph of *Sounder* demonstrates, the boy can triumph over the destructive forces of both man and time and can remember his father often, whole and at his best, with Sounder at his side:

> The pine trees would look down forever on a lantern burning out of oil but not going out. A harvest moon would cast shadows forever of a man walking upright, his dog bouncing after him. And the quiet of the night would fill and echo again with the deep voice of Sounder, the great coon dog. (p. 116)

The young consciousness depicted and developed in *Sounder* is of a nature to convince and inspire both children and adults, as many letters to Armstrong demonstrate. The epic economy and simplicity of the book concentrate the depiction of this consciousness. The energy gathered in depicting it is not diffused but the result of pulling together creative forces for an imaginative leap into the mind of a Black child. Such imaginative identification as is found in *Sounder* is the pure type of homage that children pay to those they love and respect. The homage that is paid to Moses Waters in *Sour Land* is of another order, adult and diffuse.

Sour Land centers on Moses, not *in* him. He is always seen through the eyes of others. The discrepancy between the way two different groups of people react to him is the central irony of the book. Principally, however, it is the consciousness of Anson that perceives Moses for the reader. Although Anson's children too respond to Moses, their inner feelings are never directly available to us; the children are always dramatically depicted or seen through adult eyes.

Both the way in which others think and talk about him and the lack of a child's viewpoint distance the reader from Moses Waters and force the reader to identify not with any one character but

rather with the *group* of characters who care for Moses and recognize his worth, while recoiling from the group who can see him only as a "nigger." The point of view in *Sounder* seems to say to the reader, "You are the boy. Live his life with him." *Sour Land* says to the reader, "Look at Moses. You must be either for or against him. These are the reasons you should be for him."

Besides this basic difference in point of view, another major distinction between the two works lies in the use and type of imagery and symbolism. Both books use nature imagery. A pervasive line of imagery in *Sounder* is the bestial vs. the human. Closely knit into the line of human-beast imagery is the imagistic theme of mutilation. Sounder, unlike bestial humans, does not mutilate his prey (p. 4), but his own wounds prefigure the father's, both caused, directly or indirectly, by human agency.

Already mentioned are the boy's fantasies about the bestial humans. More subtle is the line that begins with the "torn book" that the boy, himself just wounded by the guard's missile, rescues from the garbage just before he, in turn, is rescued by the school teacher, who shows him a mutilated flowering plant and tells him:

> "Some animal dug under the roots and tore them loose from the earth. It was wilted badly and might have died. But I reset it, and I water it every day. It's hard to reset a plant if it's wilted too much; the life has gone out of it. But this one will be all right. I see new leaves startin'." (p. 94)

The mutilated plant is, of course, analogous not only to the physical being of the boy, with his recently mutilated hand, but to that very consciousness with which we are identifying.

Although not partaking of such grand simplicity, there is a pervasive natural imagery that lies behind the title, *Sour Land*. This refers initially to Cedar Corners, site of the Black community, where "squatter ex-slaves . . . built their shanties on land white men didn't want after the war." (p. 18) Later this image expands to include the entire community, and perhaps even a state of mind, when Enoch says of Moses, shortly before his death by violence: "An epic life unfound . . . in another climate of appreciation, in a land not sour beyond sweetening, his epic life would have been found." (p. 96)

A major difference, however, between the two books lies in this area of imagery, symbolism, and closely related allusion: the difference is in the use of the Bible. In *Sounder*, the Old Testament is part of the boy's life and a major source of inspiration for action. Although there are allusions to the Old Testament in *Sour Land*, the New Testament and the figure of Christ come to the fore at the end of that novel. The elegiac point of view prepares for the

identification of Moses with Christ; his saintliness is made explicit even before his martyrdom: "... legend moved towards sainthood in the minds of Enoch Morris and Anson Stone." (p. 96) Then, on a morning in April, traditionally the month of Christ's death, Anson finds Moses on Moses' doorstep, slaughtered as if he were a hog. As Anson leaves Moses' house, after the sheriff and his truck have destroyed the garden, all nature seems different:

> The smells and sounds of spring were gone. The white dogwoods stood like shrouded ghosts. The rosebud turned back to the Judas tree — a name by which people called it because there was a legend that Jesus's cross had been made of its wood. (pp. 110-11)

This is clearly a crucifixion scene; it is followed by a funeral in which Moses is honored but, naturally, by no resurrection. The hope for the future in the ending rests primarily on Moses' influence on the good Whites, who are still helpless against the travesties of justice that caused his death.

In both *Sounder* and *Sour Land* there is spiritual victory for victims and survivors, but in the latter that victory is of a more complex and other-worldly nature, just as the New Testament is more other-worldly than the Old. Not only does justice not prevail in this book, but the last pages project images of apocalyptical decadence and decay that suggest desolation. Indeed, one might say that there seems a difference here in point of view in the non-technical sense: *Sounder* is an hopeful book; *Sour Land* is despairing.

This despair is characteristic of adult literature, just as the central consciousness of this elegiac book is adult rather than childlike. In subject matter *Sounder* expands and strains the limits of what might be called a child's book; nevertheless, its emphasis on the development and growth of the central consciousness of the boy upholds and sustains both character and reader through the most horrifying experiences. *Sounder* depicts a quest for self transformation clearly and sweetly fulfilled in the best tradition of the children's classic. In *Sour Land*, adult pessimism for life on this earth prevails: that very same consciousness is extinguished by a vicious blow to the head; the daffodils that Moses has planted are trampled by the sheriff. It is doubtful, Armstrong implies, at least in these last scenes, that Moses' blood can sweeten the sour land as Moses Waters himself continually tried to do through his life and works.

Edward Stratemeyer, Writer for the Mass Market of Boys and Girls

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Articles and books about older adolescent literature may vary in contents, but a reader can be sure that whether the material is aimed at a librarian or an English teacher one writer is almost certain to be attacked. Some critics may find an occasional kind word for mass writers like Oliver Optic or Harry Castlemon or John T. Trowbridge or Kirk Munro, but those same writers are almost certain to castigate the work of Edward Stratemeyer, the most popular writer for boys and girls during the first thirty years of this century and still, through his daughter Harriet Adams, peddling his wares most effectively.

Who was Stratemeyer? What did he do that led to all the attacks? Why did his books sell so very well?

Biographical information on Stratemeyer is not all that difficult to find. Entries on his life can be found in the *Dictionary of American Biographers* (New York: Scribner, 1936, Vol. 18, p. 125), Albert Johannsen's *The House of Beadle and Adams and Its Dime and Nickel Novels* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950, Vol. 2, pp. 264-265), and Anne Commire (ed.) *Something About the Author* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1971, Vol. 1, pp. 1-2, 208-210). But let me briefly fill in a few details on his life.

Stratemeyer was born on October 4, 1862, the son of a German immigrant who migrated to California during the Gold Rush and then returned to New Jersey. We know that in 1886 Stratemeyer worked for his step-brother and that at some time during that year Stratemeyer wrote an 18,000 word serial, *Victor Horton's Idea*, and sent it to a weekly magazine for boys. Apparently, both his father and step-brother questioned his sanity in wasting time writing when he could have been working harder at the store to get ahead. Any questions they had about Stratemeyer's writing ability were disposed of when Stratemeyer got a $75.00 check in the return mail. Then, even his father urged him onward in his writing. He wrote several more serials for a Philadelphia weekly for boys, *Golden Days*, and then moved on to becoming editor in the 1890's of Street & Smith's boys' weekly, *Good News*, eventually building the circulation to more than 200,000 before moving on to the editorship of *Young People of America* and later *Bright*

Days. His time with Street & Smith prepared him for his far more popular writing to come and led to his friendships with some popular writers of the time, notably Frederick Dey (author of Nick Carter stories), Upton Sinclair (who was writing dime novels then), William T. Adams (popular under the pen name of Oliver Optic), H. R. Gordon (also one of the more popular writers for boys under the pen name Edward S. Ellis), and Horatio Alger. Indeed, Stratemeyer wrote several dime novels for the *Log Cabin Library* and several women's serials for the *New York Weekly* under the pen name of Julia Edwards. Stratemeyer's first major break came when he was asked to complete the unfinished last novel of Oliver Optic, *An Undivided Union,* and the last eleven or so books by Alger.

His first book to appear in hardback under his own name was *Richard Dare's Venture, or, Striking Out for Himself* in 1894, the first of a series he called *Bound to Succeed.* Later books had that same kind of Horatio Alger title, e.g., *Shorthand Tom, or The Exploits of a Bright Boy* and *Reuben Stone's Discovery, or, The Young Miller of Torrent Bend.*

In 1898, Stratemeyer had his second big break. He wrote a book about two boys on a battleship, though he knew nothing particularly about the topic, and sent the manuscript to Boston publisher Lee and Shepard. Only a few days after it was received, Admiral Dewey's victory at Manila on May 1, 1898, made all the headlines. Stratemeyer revised the book to make it more topical and to place the two boys at the scene of Dewey's victory and the book was a huge success. *Under Dewey at Manila, or, The War Fortunes of a Castaway* went through numerous printings in 1898 and for several years to follow and greatly increased Stratemeyer's popularity with boys *and* publishers.

Obviously unwilling to let go of a good thing, Stratemeyer used the same major characters in his next books, *A Young Volunteer in Cuba, or, Fighting for the Single Star; Fighting in Cuban Waters, or, Under Schley on the Brooklyn; Under Otis in the Philippines, or, A Young Officer in the Tropics; The Campaign of the Jungle, or, Under Lawton Through Luzon;* and *Under MacArthur, or, Last Battles in the Philippines,* all under the umbrella series title, *Old Glory,* all published from 1898 to 1901. Even less willing to give up on those major characters, Stratemeyer created his *Soldiers of Fortune* series, all set in the Orient, all published from 1900 through 1906.

By this time, Stratemeyer had certainly not become the phenomenon of the adolescent publishing industry, but he was certainly a young man on the make. Major publishing companies of the time

like Grosset & Dunlap and Cupples & Leon wooed him, asking for any books he was writing.

Most of his early series under his own name dealt with war or patriotism, e.g., *Minute Boys* series (1898-1904) and *Mexican War* series (1900-1902) or with Alger-like series of getting ahead through hard work, e.g., *Working Upward* series (1897) and *Bound to Succeed* (1899) and *American Boys' Biographical* series (1901) or school and sports, e.g., *Lakeport* series (1904-1912) and *Dave Porter* series (1905-1919).

Happy indications (or ominous forebodings for critics who disliked Stratemeyer's work) of things to come came in 1899 when Stratemeyer published the first three volumes of a series under the pen name of Arthur M. Winfield (Arthur for author, M. because Stratemeyer expected to make millions from the series, Winfield because he hoped to win the field in juvenile fiction). That series, the *Rover Boys,* ultimately ran to thirty books (1899-1926) and was incredibly popular in the United States, selling somewhere between five and six million copies. The series also sold well in England, Canada, and Australia and was translated into German and Czechoslovakian.

His third major break came sometime in 1906 when Stratemeyer was able to convince Cupples & Leon into publishing his books for fifty cents rather than the common $1.00 or $1.50 per copy. Cupples & Leon probably doubted Stratemeyer's sanity since the drop in price carried with it less royalty per book for the author. What they didn't count on was the vastly increased number of copies sold, which benefited both the company and the author almost beyond belief. One gimmick Cupples & Leon used guaranteed a steady supply of potential customers. The company included on the jacket of its books a coupon which, when filled with names and addresses of ten boys, entitled all the boys to receive copies of an illustrated catalog of books. Each book listed author and title *plus* some tantalizing tidbits to attract almost any red-blooded American boy.

Later in 1906, Stratemeyer had his fourth major break, the one that changed both his writing habits and his bank balance. By this time it had become obvious to him (and probably to publishers) that the normal day simply wasn't long enough for his ability to create series and plots and characters. So, modeling his idea after the syndicate formed by Dumas, Stratemeyer set up his Literary Syndicate.

Details may be lacking, but the general idea was and is clear. Stratemeyer wrote three-page outlines detailing settings and characters along with a chapter-by-chapter outline of the plot. He sent

these to various writers who were given from one week to six weeks to fill in the book. When the copy arrived at Stratemeyer's office, he edited and tightened the prose and eliminated any discrepancies. Then it was off to the printer. Writers were paid flat sums, $50 to $150, depending upon the importance of a particular series or the writer's abilities. Leslie McFarlane was one of those writers, the author of the first twenty-six *Hardy Boys,* and his autobiography, *Ghost of the Hardy Boys* (New York: Two Continents, 1976) gives a funny and detailed account of the way the Syndicate ran.

The first series the Syndicate developed sold better than anything Stratemeyer had previously published. Using the words of writer Howard Garis, *Tom Swift* appeared in 1910 and went on until the publication of the fortieth book in 1941, selling something like 15 million copies.

Series books had several things in common. Early in the first chapter of all books following the first one of the series would be some link to the previous book or books, some hook that would make any reader aware that he had missed something very exciting. In the last paragraph or so of the last chapter, another hook appeared, this one suggesting that if the present volume was exciting, the reader had an even greater thrill ahead of him once the next book appeared. As Andrew Svenson, later a partner in the Syndicate, said, "The trick in writing children's books is to set up danger, mystery and excitement on page one. Force the kid to turn the page. I've written page one as many as twenty times. Then in the middle of each chapter there's a dramatic point of excitement and, at chapter's end, a cliffhanger." (Ed Zukerman, "The Great Hardy Boys' Whodunit," *Rolling Stone,* Sept. 9, 1976, p. 39.) Readers of series books, especially the two best-sellers of all times, *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew,* remember those cliffhanging moments of "Watch out, Frank or Nancy." Finally, somewhere about halfway through the second chapter of most series books (excluding the *Hardy Boys* or *Nancy Drew*) excitement was temporarily suspended so the writer could update the reader about the entire series prior to the current volume.

In *Baseball Joe, Pitching Wizard,* the fourteenth and last of the once popular *Baseball Joe* series, Baseball Joe and friend Jim Barclay watch a man fall headlong over a cliff, run to him, recognize a long-time villain, and as they begin to talk, the author interrupts with a six-page summary of the first thirteen volumes telling of Baseball Joe's humble beginnings, his school problems and baseball victories, his playing for the local team, his one year at Yale, his playing on the Giants, the Cubs, the Reds, the Dodgers, his desire

to manage a major league team, his incredible pitching (the greatest pitcher of all times), his incredible hitting (the home-run king of all time), his travels abroad with his team, his managership of a minor league team after the villain wounded him, and on and on and on and on and on and on. After that whirlwind trip through the life story of a truly amazing man, the author returns us to the book with the words, "Now to return to Joe and Jim as they stood amazed and perplexed at the recognition of Moe Russnak as the man who had fallen into the gully." They really don't write books like that anymore.

With all Stratemeyer's apparent good fortune, he did suffer from one attack that began not too long after the establishment of the Boy Scouts of America. James E. West, Chief Scout Executive, became alarmed at what he considered the miserable juvenile literature pouring from presses, and he wrote, "The boys' taste is being constantly vitiated and exploited by the mass of cheap juvenile literature. To meet this grave peril the Library Commission of the Boy Scouts of America has been organized."

Not long afterward, Franklin K. Mathiews, Chief Scout Librarian, visited Louis Reed of Grosset & Dunlap proposing that the company publish a list of "better" boys' books to make finer literature more widely available in cheaper form. The company agreed, and on November 1, 1913, there appeared the list of books, ultimately running to seventy-five titles, including some classics like Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and John Masefield's *Jim Davis* and some contemporary boys' books like Ralph Henry Barbour's *For the Honor of the School* and William Heyliger's *Bartley, Freshman Pitcher*. Mathiews became almost impassioned about the cause, especially in an article, "Blowing Out the Boys' Brains," which appeared in the November 18, 1914, *Outlook*. Mathiews waxes alternately indignant and rambling about the threat of what he considered bad boys' books, citing all the horrors that can happen to the casual reader of these wild and improbable adventure tales and saying at one point, "I wish I could label each one of these books: Explosives! Guaranteed to Blow Your Boy's Brains Out." He concludes with a letter he had just received from a scoutmaster in Michigan. A young boy had run away, and Mathiews obviously believed that he had run away because he had been exposed to some "cheap reading."

In the long run, the Boy Scout approved books sold reasonably well though they never competed successfully with the Stratemeyer Syndicate books. Mathiews made one last ditch effort to hurt the Syndicate when he persuaded Frederic C. Melcher and the American Association of Book Publishers to establish the first National

Children's Book Week in 1919. While this may have benefited librarians or children, in no way did it seem to harm Stratemeyer or his Syndicate. Proof that nothing apparently was going to stop Stratemeyer can be found in the survey of young people's reading in 1926, Carleton Washburne and Mabel Vogel's *Winnetka Graded Book List* (Chicago: ALA, 1926) and two supplements to that list in the February and March 1927 issues of *Elementary English Review.*

The pseudonyms used by Stratemeyer were many indeed. He wrote a number of books under his own name, and those by Arthur M. Winfield and Captain Ralph Bonehill are by Stratemeyer. Leslie McFarlane wrote the first twenty-six *Hardy Boys* and three of the *Dana Girls,* Howard Garis wrote the first thirty-five *Tom Swift*'s, and Harriet Adams (Stratemeyer's daughter) wrote the *Nancy Drew* books after her father had completed the first three. But precisely who wrote the following series under Stratemeyer Syndicate house names is open to conjecture. This is only a partial list of pen names pushed by the Syndicate.

BOYS' BOOKS

Victor Appleton: *Tom Swift, Don Sturdy, Moving Picture Boys, Moving Picture Chums*
Victor Appleton II: *Tom Swift, Jr.*
Lester Chadwick: *Baseball Joe, College Sports*
Allen Chapman: *Tom Fairfield, Fred Fenton, Boys of Business, Radio Boys, Ralph of the Railroad*
Elmer A. Dawson: *Garry Grayson*
Franklin W. Dixon: *Hardy Boys, Ted Scott*
James Cody Ferris: *X Bar X Boys*
Grahame Forbes: *The Boys of Columbia High*
Lt. Howard Payson: *Boy Scout, Motor Cycle Chums*
Nat Ridley, Jr.: *Nat Ridley Rapid Fire Detective*
Roy Rockwood: *Speedwell Boys, Dave Dashaway, Great Marvel, Dave Fearless, Bomba*
Clarence Young: *Jack Ranger, Motor Boys, Racer Boys*

GIRLS' BOOKS

May Hollis Barton: *The Barton Books for Girls*
Annie Roe Carr: *Nan Sherwood*
Alice B. Emerson: *Ruth Fielding, Betty Gordon*
Grace Gordon: *Patsy Carroll*
Grace Brooks Hill: *Corner House Girls*
Laura Lee Hope: *Moving Picture Girls, Outdoor Girls, Bobbsey Twins, Blythe Girls*
Carolyn Keene: *Nancy Drew, Dana Girls*

Gertrude W. Morrison: *Girls of Central High*
Margaret Penrose: *Radio Girls, Motor Girls, Dorothy Dale*
Edna Winfield: *Holly Library*

Estimates of the total number of books produced by the Syndicate vary from a low of 800 to a less probable guess of 1200. In any case the Syndicate produced an incredible number of books.

Stratemeyer died on May 10, 1930, but the Syndicate goes on. Harriet Adams and Edna Squier, Stratemeyer's daughters, carried on until 1942 when Mrs. Squier became an inactive partner. Andrew E. Svenson joined the Syndicate in 1948 and was a partner until his death in 1975.

Despite English teacher and librarian opposition, despite all the work of Franklin K. Mathiews and the Boy Scout movement, the Stratemeyer Syndicate went on to producing and selling. During World War II the Syndicate dropped several series mostly because the books were dating badly and were losing readers. The two best-selling series were maintained and have increased, both in series titles and in readers, the *Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew* (the latter sold 2,300,000 copies only a year or two back).

It's been said so frequently that the Stratemeyer books had limited literary value that everyone seems blithely willing to accept that judgment. But literary quality aside, the books provided readers over the years with suspense and humor and fun and excitement — above all, excitement. It's easy to guess that some readers may have been stalled in developing reading tastes by sampling Stratemeyer's wares, but little evidence can be found to support that view. Practically all English teachers and librarians read their share of literary horrors when young.

If Stratemeyer produced no great books, he did produce books read by millions of kids, the majority of whom liked the books, the majority of whom read Stratemeyer when young and then moved on to other things remembering the Hardy Boys or Nancy Drew or Baseball Joe with genuine affection as books that made them like reading. That is not a bad tribute for any man. Perhaps it is all we can say about Stratemeyer and his books, but what a magnificent tribute that is.

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Kathleen M. Peyton: We Are Not Prisoners of Our Past

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My husband came home this evening as I was fuming over this article. It wasn't pulling together properly, and with deadlines to meet, vacation only days away and a stack of research papers to grade, I felt hopelessly bogged down. He took one look at my woebegone expression, bundled up the children and said, "We'll see you when you're done. We'll go to a movie." I cried with relief and gratitude.

This depth of caring is rare, but it can exist. Adolescents particularly, in the confusing, rushing tide they flounder in, should know there is occasionally this kind of support available in life. There is a British writer, Kathleen M. Peyton, who knows about selfless caring, and support and growth. If we look to her and use her books, our young people may learn it too.

She is a prolific writer, with more than fifteen books to her credit, who has been well rewarded by her readers. Her books have earned many American Library Association Notable Book Awards and two Carnegie Medals, a recognition as distinguished as our own Newbery Award. Her trilogy on the Russell family, probably her best known work, received the Guardian Award.

She writes joyously of subjects she knows well. She is a horsewoman and her Russell trilogy, including the books *Flambards, The Edge of the Cloud,* and *Flambards in Summer,* expertly takes the reader to the world of the fox hunt. Along with her family, she is a sailor and books like *The Plan for Birdmash, The Maplin Bird,* and *Sea Fever* share with the reader sea adventures she has known. She also has a great love and intimate knowledge of music and her most recent trilogy brings the same to the young reader.

It is this latest trilogy I would like to share with you, because apart from the topics Ms. Peyton can handle so well, and apart from the beautifully woven language web she can weave, the Pennington trilogy transcends its topic. It brings to the reader the maze of life, its complexities, its problems, its failures, but also its chances — the chances to break out of a rut to carve a new way.

All quotations are from Crowell editions.

Perhaps Ms. Peyton writes with such strength about this because England is traditionally a class society. America is becoming one. She does not allow her characters to succumb to their programming, nor does she make the way out easy for them. They struggle and they sweat; they grow up carrying their weaknesses as weights on their backs, but ultimately it is clear their life is their own. To me, this is essential knowledge.

The hero of this trilogy is Patrick Pennington and we meet him first in *Pennington's Last Term.* He is a tough, undisciplined genius in his last term of high school in a village on the Essex coast. He is a pox on his professors for his repeated defiance of authority. The son of violent, belligerent parents, he sees life as decidedly unfair, weighted against him. His one talent, which he admits to only grudgingly, is a native and remarkable genius for the piano. His teacher, one ally in a sea of enemies, pushes and nags and coerces him to take advantage of this ability. In the end, Patrick has used up his chances with the law and with school authority. On the brink of expulsion from school and looking forward to a term in a reformatory, he is heard playing by Professor Hampton, a famous music teacher, who intercedes and indentures him to study at a London music school under his tutelage.

The second novel, *The Beethoven Medal,* finds Pat home from music school for the summer working odd jobs and practicing piano in the Town Hall. Two years have passed and there is now a tentative balance between his aggressive, defiant nature and his commitment to the gentler art of music. Ruth, a young village girl, sees Pat delivering bread in a van and falls passionately in love with him. As she gradually comes to know him, he emerges to her as a complex maze of contradictions. This awareness does not ease her ardor, but only strengthens it and in the end of the novel, when Pat's slugging of a policeman tips the scales away from music school and toward a nine-month prison term, Ruth promises to wait faithfully for his release.

As *Pennington's Heir* opens, Pat is released from prison, not only to the arms of the loyal Ruth, but also to the demands and discipline of Professor Hampton. Ruth's unexpected pregnancy and Pat's agonizing decision to marry her throws his future into an entirely bleak light. He must now carve his own success, without the professor, without Clarissa (a rich ex-girl friend), without money, and more devastating, *with* Ruth and a baby to support. The novel is a tender and yet honest saga of the first year of marriage. Peyton continually shifts emphasis from Ruth to Pat and back again to achieve a balance in presenting a complex relationship during a difficult time. As the novel closes, after the final

calamity of a broken right hand and its painful and expensive mending, Pat can see through clearer and wiser eyes that the hard times are nearly over.

I can understand Patrick Pennington's appeal to the fragile but determined Ruth. I am halfway in love with him myself. Peyton's development of this character is in no way stereotypical. He exhibits a complexity in his nature that is very real, attractive and yet uncommon. And with all the unpleasant and undesirable attributes that very assuredly belong to Pat, one is thankful that he doesn't mask them. What Pat is, he is fully and without sham. Even his dark side seems appealing. Bates, his best friend from high school, on a return visit in *Pennington's Heir,* says this of Pat and his vocation:

> There's something about Pat . . . It's because you feel, with him, that he won't ever give in. He was like that in school. They just couldn't win, whatever they did to him. And now with this, there's this colossal will power-single-mindedness. It drives him. And when you think what it's for: although he knows it's got to make him money — he's playing from money, if you like — it's only got to make him money to justify his going on playing, which is the only thing that means anything at all to him. And most people — I think most people feel like me — you feel you want to have a hand in it, somehow — you admire it; you know you could never do it yourself, so the best you can do is tag along and want to be his friend. (*Pennington's Heir,* 1973, p. 210.)

Bates isn't the only one who wants to have a hand in it. Peyton does not let Pat grow up entirely without support. She provides him with two influential, though not entirely positive, adult mentors. There is "Dotty Old Crocker," his high school music teacher, who says to him one day during a difficult lesson:

> 'You can't do what you want all your life Pennington.'
>
> Penn was indignant. 'But I don't! I do what other people want all the time. That's what gets me — '
>
> 'And what would you do if you could do exactly what you wanted?'
>
> This had floored Penn before now. He had no answer. He was angry and sullen. 'I wouldn't do this for a start.'
>
> 'No, you ignorant child, and I wouldn't do this!' Mr. Crocker's venom startled Penn. 'But we're stuck with it, Pennington. Both of us. And we must make the best of it. And let me tell you Pennington that this gift God gave you, which you are too thick-headed to acknowledge, is the one and only grace you possess or are likely to possess, and while I'm stuck with my part in this ill-conceived system, I'm going to make quite sure that you're stuck with yours. So get on with it! You're wasting time, Pennington. You've only got *two hours* today, and there's a lifetime of work ahead of you!' (*Pennington's Last Term,* 1970, pp. 130, 131.)

Pennington graduates from Crocker's influence to that of the slickly sophisticated and renowned Professor Hampton. If Penn thinks he is browbeaten in high school, his years of tutelage under the professor brings him closer to losing his own will than anything he has ever known. Hampton has bought him. He has bought him with an education at a London music school, introduction to the best people, and a promise of a future in music that Penn is ill-fitted to pursue on his own. But the price? The price is too high, for if Patrick stays on this track he will have lost his rebellious will, the quality that is as uniquely his own as his talent. Peyton doesn't allow him to trade in his spirit for success. She makes him meld the two.

And the melding is softened by Ruth. At times Ruth does seem to be, as Bates would say, tagging along. With the full swell of the feminist movement sweeping the United States, I was tempted to see Ruth's dogged devotion to Pat as degrading. But as I read, and thought, this devotion emerges as her greatest strength. She is as simple as Pat is complex. There is no role playing involved in her love for Pat. She recognizes early on the dedication and toil inherent in his art.

On her first real date with Pat, he takes her to London to hear a live piano concerto with full orchestration. She listens to Rachmaninoff's *Second Piano Concerto:*

> Ruth had always rather thought it was a gift. But when the anticipatory hush fell and the soloist wiped his hands nervously on his knees and the conductor raised his baton, she felt a lurch of compassion for his terrible responsibility, before all these people, to hit the right notes — the loneliness of it was appalling. There were surely, she thought, easier ways to pay the mortgage than this? And then his hands came down and played the first broken chords, and it was so fluid, and effortless that her anxiety instantly slipped away. Softly at first, and then with an increasing urgency, the chords led the way into a deep turbulent melody. Ruth saw the violinists before her lift their bows, the conductor raise his baton with a tense white expectancy holding in leash the whole gamut of poised breath and suspended finger until the exact perfect moment when the solo piano could be resisted no longer, and they were launching on this eager rhythmic tide which the piano had prepared for them. Ruth, having expected difficulties and incomprehension, was launched along with them, a drowning twig on a breast of flowing waters. Work it might be to them, but to Ruth, completely new to such a happening, it was an overwhelming emotional experience which she had no wish or will to resist. She could not have put into words the effect it had on her; she only knew that in the slow movement she cried, and in the finale she cried again, but she was so happy it was crying for God knows what. Ruth didn't know. But in the crashing uproar of the applause after-

> ward, she was comforted to see that the soloist, bowing and shaking hands with the conductor, looked almost as shaken as she felt, although what emotion was prompting him she was not qualified to guess at. If it was only work, after all, it could have been pure relief. (*The Beethoven Medal*, 1971, pp. 33-34.)

Ruth learns quickly what emotion has prompted the soloist because it isn't long before she hears Patrick play the very same piece. Only this time it is in no fancy London salon, but in the Village Hall. Patrick, a mere music student, has been selected to play with an eminent German conductor, Herr Backhaus, for a music festival. And this time the soloist will not be lauded and praised for his efforts, but whisked off immediately following the concert to a penitentiary to serve a nine-month term. (The week before the concert, Pat, the genius, had decked a policeman.)

So this is Ruth's lot. And she has chosen it. She has chosen to wait for this man through all those nine months, with agonizing weekly visits carried out through a glass barrier. But as a result, when after his release, Ruth finds herself unexpectedly pregnant, Pat chooses to marry her rather than bolt, which I suspect would be his natural tendency.

Now, for both of them, the cream must rise to the top. Pat is without the support of the professor whose anger at the marriage has destroyed his last shred of patience. Pat does not have Clarissa nor her powerful parents to sponsor him. He has no steady job and no money. What he does have is Ruth, carrying his child, and tenuous belief in his own ability. Ruth offers little else but a sharing in that belief. She is struck by the enormity of their undertaking one day as she goes to look at a room to rent, early in *Pennington's Heir*. It is a single room, in a large house, but it boasts one commodity, or necessity — a piano.

> It was very large, shabby, gracious and cold, with a high corniced ceiling, faded rugs on the parquet floor and faded curtains at the windows. It had a double divan in it — and the enormous piano, which was parked like a car across the French windows. Ruth stood looking, feeling.... She knew that if they had this room it could see them happy and successful, or it could see them in debt, or ill, or in despair; it could be warm and kind, or it could tax them beyond their means. It could see Pat to the concert platform, applauded and smiling, or it could watch him work in vain. The piano, silent, dusty and neglected, was like a key to their future, to let them in or shut them out.
>
> Ruth did not want to be aware of all this, but it was as if, standing there, the realization came at her: cobwebs of feelings, half-sensed, touching her.... Ruth had no idea why she felt so solemn just looking at a room, but she could not help herself. She thought it must be the weather and her condition — and yet,

> far inside herself, she knew that the feelings were the real truth. It wasn't just a great coincidence that she had married Pat; it was all part of something that had a pattern yet to be worked out. For the first time, it seemed, she was aware of the dangers. She was frightened. She might have ruined Pat, if it didn't work out right. His path with the professor would have been smooth and clear and inevitable. With her, it had obstacles as big as double-decker buses.
>
> 'Oh, God,' she said to the piano. 'Make it be all right! Make it work!' (*Pennington's Heir*, pp. 67, 68.)

I don't know how much of that first year can be attributed to God's work, perhaps it is loving neglect. But in Ruth and Pat, there is some real work going on there. By the end of the year there is a balance. Ruth has learned to push Pat when he needs pushing, and she has learned to let him be when his music overtakes him. And Pat, after giving weeks of music lessons to Clarissa, who sees Ruth and her baby as only a detail to be dispensed with before she can again possess Pat, is able finally to answer her question,

> 'Do you love Ruth?'
>
> 'Yes.'
>
> 'But you only married her because—' Her voice dropped. 'Did you love her then when you married her?' . . .
>
> 'I don't know. I was scared, I suppose. But I know now. . . . I've got all I want and I'm not having you trying to break it up, pretending you want to learn the piano . . . I'm not going to hurt Ruth.' (*Pennington's Heir*, pp. 191-193.)

The young couple has achieved their freedom and soldered tightly their union. Between them they share young Ludwig, the scowling heir. In a crisis, Ruth is now able to go to the professor for help. They are independent enough to be able to accept help, and all three know it. The crisis passed, the concert dates begin to come in and the story ends not blissfully, but hopefully.

Perhaps we would do well, as Bates suggested, to tag along with K. M. Peyton and share her trilogy with our students. In this confused age, when childhood and family life sometimes seem to be, at best, an experiment, young people must know that ultimately their adulthood belongs to them. I agree with Peyton; we are not prisoners of our past.

What Can We Do About Johnny? A Plea for Literature in the Grades

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Much has been written about Johnny and his inability to read. Parents blame the schools; schools blame the parents and Johnny. The burden can, no doubt, be shared by Johnny, his parents, and his teachers. Yet, can a six-year-old child be held responsible for his lack of interest in school, for his lack of interest in the printed word, or for his inability to recognize the letters that form the symbols or words which are man's means of communication with his fellowman? If not, then we must point the finger at the guilty ones — the persons who shape the lives of children.

Certainly the influence that parents have on children is tremendous. It is significant that, whether the influence is good or bad, no one can demand that it be altered. Parental jurisdiction is absolute! Except in cases of child abuse, the courts can do nothing about the ways children are raised. Johnny is too young to be held accountable and his parents are untouchable. The onus for Johnny's reading is on the teacher.

Teachers are charged with the responsibility of teaching all of the children of all the people to read, write, add, and subtract. Teachers have taken an unwritten oath to educate children so that they will become happy, productive citizens. Teachers must develop a love of learning in the child as well as teach him the basics — reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Frequently, a teacher becomes involved only with the mechanics of the job. Teach children the alphabet; teach them how to count; teach them how to read; teach them to add and subtract. These are basic mechanical skills that everyone needs. Yet recent statistics indicate that twenty-seven percent of America's adult population are functional illiterates. Put more simply, these people have not learned the basic mechanical skills.

It seems that in order to teach the skills which have been receiving a modicum of emphasis we must find a means of motivation — some way to get the child interested in possessing the skills. A four-year-old wants to be taught to count to ten when he realizes he needs that knowledge to play hide-and-go-seek. Teaching a child to read means teaching a skill. Many youngsters do not learn to read because they do not want to learn. Too often teachers concen-

trate on the skill itself, forgetting that being able to read words is of secondary importance. The child must be made aware of the pleasures and satisfactions that can be derived from reading.

But how do we make children aware of pleasures and satisfactions in reading? Certainly in teaching the skill of reading a teacher must use drill. And reading the dull, contrived "stories" in a primer is not very exciting. There is the initial thrill of recognition of words and the delight of being able to say, "I can read." But how many people can maintain pleasure for a long period of time as a child reads — "I see the dog. The dog barks. I see a boy. He has a dog." — and so on, ad infinitum. The child, after the original excitement, soon tires of the drab plots of the contrived prose which really has no beginning, no middle, and no end. These "stories" are not stories; there is no adventure and there is so little comparison to life that the child soon becomes bored. Why spend hours reading if reading is not a supplement or a challenge to one's thoughts?

Children must be introduced to literature early in life. The ideal is to have every child interested in books prior to his attending school. But not all parents believe in the values of books. Some parents do not know the difference between a good book and an inferior one. And some parents cannot afford to buy books to read to their children. Thus, the responsibility for fostering a love of books belongs to the teacher.

Teachers must be familiar with literature for children. Teachers also need to know the interests of the children in their classrooms so that they can recommend books of high interest to each child. In the early grades there should be lots of story hours. The teacher must read and read and read to the children. Let them know that the exciting story is in a book. Then place the book on an accessible shelf. If they have liked the story, they will want to page through the book, looking at the pictures while recalling the story. They may ask to have the story read again, and perhaps the teacher can find time to reread the story. But soon children discover that they cannot always have their favorite story reread. There then seems to be only one satisfactory solution. They must try to read it for themselves. And what does it matter to anyone if they learn to read to satisfy their own individual tastes and needs. The important thing is that through books they can find pleasure or satisfaction.

Some children will find pleasure and satisfaction in reading adventure stories; others prefer mysteries; some like funny stories; some want to read stories about sports heroes; and still others prefer the world of fantasy. Cater to the tastes of the children!

Encourage their reading! It is better to nurture the reading habit than it is to develop a broad spectrum of interests. The interests of children shift so frequently that there is little danger of stagnation in one specific area, unless a teacher, librarian, or parent tries to dictate that a child's reading should be varied. Then watch the child stubbornly refuse to read anything except one particular type of book.

Lots and lots of books on lots and lots of subjects should be readily available. Every school should have a school library, but, unless a child is free to go to the library whenever he wishes to go, having a library in the school is not really sufficient. Each classroom needs its own library. In an affluent school district, the classroom library can become a reality when a teacher requests it. But not all districts have unlimited funds for books. Donations of books might be one way to acquire a classroom library; free bonus books from bookclub purchases is another means of acquisition. And a teacher should be able to borrow seventy-five to a hundred quality books from the central library. These books can be checked out to individual students — the rapid readers will probably read most of them in a month, at which time the collection should be exchanged at the central library for another seventy-five to a hundred books. Having books more readily accessible than during a weekly period in the library means that students can borrow a book whenever they want to read. The outstanding books will be recommended to the youngsters by their peers. No extensive advertising campaign is needed if good books are available.

Teachers also need to take initiative in their communities to ensure that there is a community library and that the library has good books for every age and interest of childhood. Many communities do not have libraries, and many that do are being forced to close them because of lack of funds. The public probably will not insist on having their tax dollars spent for books, if children don't want to read. Most parents, however, are willing to spend money for things they believe are good for children. Adults will be willing to spend money (tax dollars) for books if the books are being used to satisfy the needs of their children.

One of a child's basic needs is recreation or change of pace. Beginning readers need a change from the dull drill of the primer. They need to be able to escape from their work-a-day world to one that is filled with magic or consolation or understanding. Whether they find that world in Peter and Wendy's Never-Never land or on the farm with Wilbur and Charlotte is unimportant. What is important is that the child discovers the magic and the realism in books. Then Johnny will want to read.

If Johnny wants to learn to read, he'll learn. Most boys and girls are capable of doing what they want to do. It is our job as teachers to teach the skill of reading, but it is more important that we create in Johnny the desire to read. We can be molders of men or shapers of destiny by introducing Johnny to the books worthy of the name — literature.

A Boy Becomes a Man Teaching *April Morning* by Howard Fast

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Have you ever had students debating over who was right in the struggle for American independence, quoting from the *Declaration of Independence* and *Constitution* to support a thesis? Or have you ever sat enthralled as a girl strums her guitar and sings her own composition about the Battle of Lexington? Have you joined your entire class as one student leads in a song with original words telling of what happened to a young boy struggling toward manhood in 1775 in Lexington?

All of these things have happened to me. And they have happened in an English classroom. The students I am talking about were in ninth, eighth, and seventh grades respectively and lived in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Illinois.

The unit which brought about these creative, enthusiastic responses also resulted in stories portraying young people faced with problems which forced an early maturity, a newspaper written as if it were published in that period, and art work depicting characters and scenes. The book which excited so much interest was *April Morning* by Howard Fast.

As a young teacher with little experience teaching novels, I first taught *April Morning* to ninth-graders, wondering how best to approach it. Should I teach it as an example of literature and delve into its effective character development, review the basic plot structure, and allude to the implied symbolism? Should I teach it as a means of learning more about our struggle for independence? Both these approaches I have maintained to some degree, but basically I teach the novel as the study of a young boy forced by circum-

stances to grow up before his time. We talk in class of Adam's relationship with members of his family and his attitude toward himself and how these change through the course of the book.

First I recommend that the students read the entire novel for the pure enjoyment that it brings. It is short, a blessing for many who are hampered by a dislike of reading or by poor reading skills; yet it is such a wonderful story that even reluctant students finish it quickly. Next we discuss the novel, using as a basis for discussion questions which I have devised for each division of the novel. These questions are, by no means, to be answered in writing by the students. Such laborious effort destroys any enthusiasm or interest that may otherwise develop. They are merely a study guide.

During the course of the discussion I point out character development without referring to it by any such label, and we talk about the problems of growing up, of being given the understanding and respect one feels necessary, and of assuming responsibility.

Partway through our discussion of the novel, projects are assigned. There is a list of several from which students may choose: a debate about who was right, British or Americans; a composition tracing Adam's development as a man — the influences he felt, changing relationships within his family, and the person who emerges at the end of the novel, all of which must be supported by quotations, direct or indirect; a fictional story showing any young person, living during any period of history, being forced by some sudden crisis to take responsibility and thus mature; drawings of characters and scenes from the novel, again with as much supportive evidence from the novel as possible; and, finally, songs telling what happened in the novel, using melodies we all know, but with original words. All projects must be presented to the class orally by the students. One clever student added another idea last year by doing research and then writing a newspaper that was representative of the times.

April Morning, however, is by no means limited to any grade or age. Many adults with whom I have shared the novel have read it and talked about it. They have been impressed with how well it tells the story of that fateful morning and how much of the realism of life it contains, for it concentrates, not on the battle itself, but on the effect the event has on one boy's life. Although the language is, in itself, simple, the novel provokes much thought and discussion of wide-ranging topics from father-son understanding to religion and hypocrisy.

This year the teaching of the novel is being coordinated with the study of that period of history in the social studies classes; as a culminating experience, the students will see the movie, *1776*. The

fact that we recently celebrated an important anniversary of our country makes the book quite timely, but more importantly, *April Morning* can provide many classes of students — of all ages — a much better perspective on life itself. In our search for a means to humanize education, there can be no better opportunity for us English teachers than that afforded by *April Morning*.

Adolescent Literature in the Classroom—A Defense

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Whenever I express to my colleagues my desire to work adolescent literature into the curriculum, I am asked, "But can the study of junior novels or sports books be considered a *real* English course?" My answer is simple: Yes! — if you give these books the dignity they deserve.

What I am suggesting is a modified, soundly developed set of courses to be devised by English teachers specifically for *their* school. When each department works out its own program, teachers can be aware of the answer to that important question that needs to be constantly asked: WHY?

I am not talking about skill courses, those geared for development and enhancement of reading, writing, and speaking. I am acting under the assumption that no school will ignore these. What I am talking about are the literature segments of an English curriculum. And in suggesting such courses as "Adolescent Literature," "Sports Literature," and "Poetry and Contemporary Music," I am serving up examples only, as once again, I stress: each English Department must build its own curriculum!

Most often when I suggest such contemporary courses to proponents of the classics, the courses are pooh-poohed, and I am labeled a pusher of tripe or more euphemistically and more commonly, since honest language is not always a virtue in our profession, a "misguided English instructor whose intentions, anway, are good." But I contend that the contemporary literature available is far from tripe. *Nobody Waved Goodbye, Bless the Beasts and Children, The Kid, My Darling My Hamburger, Go Ask Alice, Summer of '42, The Chocolate War, Bang the Drum Slowly, A Short Season, Grandfather Rock* — all of these and scores of

others are of excellent quality and offer exciting possibilities for initiating early steps toward wisdom in young people.

In a course like "Adolescent Literature," we can help kids see that there are many things common to all young generations. In the literature of the adolescent, we can, through Maia Wojciechowska's *A Single Light,* show the smothering, despairing void that settles in when the love children desperately need is withheld from them. We can help the kids confront the problems that occur when one makes people, situations, and events larger than what they are or ought to be, through Barbara Wersba's *Run Softly, Go Fast* and Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding.* We can examine with them the difficulties in coping with slowly emerging, mysterious, and sometimes newly identifiable personal traits through John Knowles' *A Separate Peace.* We can deal with what it means to be rejected or perceived so and where to go from there with Paul Zindel's *I Never Loved Your Mind.*

And are these matters crucial or trivial to the development of wisdom as I defined earlier? Is there any question! And at the same time as we are confronting issues crucial to the students we face, we are developing in them the habit of seeing worth in literature, of seeing that it is possible through books to plot one's own position in the universe, of seeing that Emily Dickinson was not just some wacky hermit when she said, "There is no frigate like a book."

In a course in "Sports Literature," students can be shown that the world of sports is microcosmic. Sports figures are human; they struggle, suffer, and die as all of us do, *just* as all of us do. Professional athletes have their unions and their strikes, and just as a carpenters' or electricians' strike can paralyze a segment of society, so also can a strike by baseball players or football players or the players of any sport which offers what appears to be a necessary escape for millions of Americans. Through literature dealing with the Olympics, we can show that the personal driving force necessary to become an Olympic champion is not a whole lot different from the demands of ambition necessary to succeed in any worthwhile endeavor.

Competition in sports is fierce and to the winner go the spoils, as in war, as in business, as in all of life. The choice of materials for a course in "Sports Literature" is nearly endless. *Out of My League, They Call Me Coach, Run to Daylight, The Quality of Courage, The Contender, Meat on the Hoof, Fear Strikes Out, Winning Is the Only Thing, It's Good to Be Alive, I Am Third* are some. Beyond these, all that need be done is to consult with

any publisher or distributor since quality sports literature is exploding. We might even ask the kids.

And if we can develop the perception of some truth and some measure of level-headed assessment in our students concerning where they are and where they and their society are going through sports literature, aren't they then better prepared to tackle what some might consider more challenging literary stuff? And even for those students who will never be ready to move to other literature, have we not given them more than they might have gotten from a large anthology which aims its choice of material at some mysterious, indefinable, typical, normal student — whatever that is!

In a course "Poetry and Contemporary Music," the possibilities for exciting learning activities are broad and deep. Is the exhilaration of the English Romantic poets really any different from that contained in the lyrics of John Denver? When discussing love poetry, what better examples are there of the dedication, loyalty, and total giving of self that is love than in Carole King's "You've Got a Friend" or Paul Simon's "Song for the Asking" and "Bridge Over Troubled Water"? If we are, in our classes, after an understanding of poetic devices, why can't we first turn to taped segments of the lyrics of today's songwriters? Students can be taught personification through Denver's "... watch the evening tire" (in "Poems, Prayers, and Promises"); they can learn simile through Cat Stevens' "Her eyes like windows, tricklin rain upon her pain. ..." (in "Sad Lisa"); they can learn metaphor through Elton John's "... you're a star in the face of the sky" (in "Daniel"); they can learn the use of symbols in Neil Diamond's "Shiloh"; they can be led to understand poetic satire through Simon's "7 'o'Clock News"; they can see hyperbole in Stevens' "Well you've cracked the sky, scrapers fill the air. ..." (in "Where Do the Children Play?"); they can feel the beauty and richness of imagery in Don McLean's allegory "American Pie." And the opportunities go on and on.

In suggesting these materials for a responsible course of study in a high school English program, I intend them to be viewed as proper substance for whole courses and not just token activities that we include in the larger scheme of things to show our kids that we are "relevant" or "with it." No, I intend them as serious studies of serious subject matter to serve as a base for the same kinds of quality learning experiences teachers have for years and years introduced in their classrooms.

We are in a crucial time in our English Departments as we attempt to develop a clear sense of where we are going and why.

Noted author Hans P. Guth warns us in the December 1975 issue of this bulletin, that we are currently "witnessing a confused retreat." He says, "In the name of basic skills and basic literacy, we see a revival of methods and routines that the profession abandoned because they DID NOT WORK — because they were, for many or most of our students, wrongly based, counterproductive, pervasively negative in their whole orientation."

Again and again, I hear and read of schools and individual teachers who seem to be going back to Guth's "abandoned methods and routines" in their classes and using the shopworn motive that "we must prepare our students for college and life." In fact, I suspect such schools and teachers relish the opportunity to do so again unchallenged, perhaps even cheered, since such methods and routines are infinitely easier. Yet this reason has never seemed valid to me and still doesn't.

Decades ago, John Dewey railed against this reason and his thoughts are certainly still applicable. So also are the views of Benjamin Franklin, who said that schools should be "delightful places."

Although it is much more difficult to teach contemporary courses like those I have described, and the teachers doing so are risking some of themselves, these courses are much more meaningfully justified in terms of NOW, and are therefore much more positive forces to today's students as they journey toward their own kind of wisdom.

I used to think that if we could introduce Shakespeare into the ghettos of young people's minds, somehow this would bring the world to peace. He was the pinnacle, the best literary history had to offer, the one writer whom all people always knew, or claimed they did. Now I no longer believe this is true; my fondest dreams were not only impossible to achieve in this manner but, in some ways, such study often contributed more frustration than what was already there.

I have come to lean first toward the Adolescent Literatures, the Sports Literatures, the Poetry and Contemporary Musics, as I have altered my approach without tempering my idealism. And later, *if* later, I come to the classics.

What I have offered here are only a few suggestions. I admit that I have no foolproof answers. Far more distressing to me are those who think they do.

The Goldenrod Will Soon Be Yellow
Jottings for My September Children's Literature Classes

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In the June 1977 *Horn Book,* British critic John Rowe Townsend, in an article titled "Peering Into the Fog: The Future of Children's Books," made the following statements:

> The best children's books today are of high merit.... If there are too many children who do not read them, the answer it not to lower the standard of the books, it is to work harder at getting them to the children.... I firmly believe there is a very large number of children who would be able to enjoy... [them] if only they were properly and enthusiastically introduced.

As I write this, I am trying to plan my fall classes in Children's Literature with Townsend's thoughts in mind. Except for the few children I know personally, I have to transmit my enthusiasm for good children's books through the college students I teach: the future nursery school, elementary, and junior high teachers. Actually, although I know I couldn't hide it if I tried, I don't believe enthusiasm on my part is essential to engender enthusiasm in my students. The books themselves will do that.

My first goal then is to choose books for my students which give them so much enjoyment that they feel compelled to pass them on to the children they know and teach. A second goal is to create in my classroom experiences that my students can duplicate in their classrooms. Several of these will be reading-aloud activities.

On the very first day (and very often thereafter) I shall read to my class. I want to make my students aware that even those who read very well can enjoy listening when the reading is well done with expression. Simply because third or fourth graders — or older children — can read does not mean that the teacher should stop reading to them. Since I have classes in two-and-a-half-hour blocks this quarter, I should be able to read aloud, in forty to fifty minutes, a short book.

On the first day I'm thinking of using *Did You Carry The Flag Today, Charlie?* Charlie is a Head Start pupil in a school in Appalachia. The book is not too long to read to second-graders (I'll mention that to the class), although I may need to abridge it some

for my own uses. Still I'll not cut it down too much. I want my students to get the full flavor — not only of the story, but also of the speech patterns. I want them to notice, too, the way Rebecca Caudill restricts the point of view to five-year-old Charlie, and has him speak as a five year old does.

As a follow-up I'll assign books about school to several people and ask them to select, read aloud, and comment on selections of their own. I'll try to find books that would be good in turn for them to read to their classes: Beverly Cleary's *Ramona the Pest* in which Ramona becomes a kindergarten drop-out is one I'll surely use. I may use *Ramona the Brave*, too; Ramona is a first grader in this book. And perhaps I'll suggest Judy Blume's *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* or her *Blubber*, a story of fifth graders who gang up to pick on one of the members of the class whom they nickname "Blubber." Eleanor Estes' *The Hundred Dresses* has a similar theme. I might even assign William Mayne's *A Swarm in May*, set in a British Cathedral choir school, because I do want to emphasize that writers other than Americans have written quality children's books.

I shall find some picture story books about nursery school: Harlow Rockwell's *My Nursery School* is one. I may also include a school integration story such as Hila Colman's *Classmates by Request*. Ursula Nordstrom's *The Secret Language*, a story of a homesick girl's adjustment to boarding school, presents another aspect of school. If I need additional titles, I'll consult the *Subject Guide to Children's Books in Print*.

This is a format I'll plan to use several times during the quarter. Not only will this type of lesson give individual students practice in reading aloud, but it will also acquaint the entire class with the great variety of books to be found on a particular theme. It is easy to think of more subjects than we will have time to explore. Among the essential topics will be stories of life in other lands, historical fiction, animals in fantasy, and realistic animal stories.

In spring quarter I'll assign a number of vacation stories: *Gone Away Lake* by Elizabeth Enright; also *Swallows and Amazons* by Arthur Ransome. I'd like my students to know the work of this first Carnegie winner. In addition, these stories of English children sailing their own boats are exciting in their own right.

I'll assign several baseball stories. Some will be funny like Scott Corbett's *The Baseball Trick*, and Elaine Konigsburg's *About the B'Nai Bagels*, in which Mark's mother coaches his Little League team. Others will be more serious. One I'll use will be Al Slote's *Matt Gargan's Boy*, in which Danny Gargan resents having a girl

on his baseball team and, to make it worse, the girl's father dates his divorced mother.

The reading aloud will not be restricted to fiction. I intend to read poetry throughout the year. On the first or second day of class I'll read John Updike's poem "September" and other good back-to-school poems. I'll find poetry for every season and holiday (even Groundhog Day). There are good poems about recent leaders (Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy) as well as fine ones about the long-time heroes. There are excellent poems about sports. I'll not put poetry off in a week by itself but read it all the time. I'll make a point of having a good ghost story for Halloween and suitable selections for the other holidays.

Another reading-aloud activity I intend to use this fall on a larger scale than in the past is reader's theater. My version of reader's theater may not fit the usual pattern, but I expect it to be an enjoyable learning experience. After reading an assigned book, a group of students will select a lively passage and read the parts of the characters with one student reading the narrative portion. This will serve as a teaser for the rest of the class. "Tom Meets Becky," a chapter from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* is one I have used previously. This excerpt is superlative entertainment. At the same time it is pure Americana, giving an excellent idea of life in a small town on the Mississippi in the 1840's. And even though the story is a hundred years old, Tom's traits are not unlike those of mischievous boys today.

According to a children's librarian, many of the best children's books are never taken from the shelves. Reader's theater will provide an opportunity to introduce to future teachers of children such excellent award-winning books as De Jong's *A Wheel on the School* and Virginia Hamilton's *Planet of Junior Brown* and *M. C. Higgins the Great.* We, as teachers, have an obligation to present those books that will become a lasting heritage for children everywhere.

I'm looking forward to fall. I'll not be in the football stadium but I have a cheer anyway, although it's for quality children's books, not gridiron stars. Now altogether, one, two, three: "For crying out loud, let's read aloud!"